

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE BEST OF  
SPEAKING  
TREE

VOLUME 2







WITH LOVE TO  
HINDU EDUCATION SOCIETY KASHMIR  
FROM :  
DR. N.L. ZUTSHI, Mumbai

G.M. College of Education  
Raipur, Bantalab  
Jammu.

Acc No... 3266 (D)  
Dated 4-6-19









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# THE BEST OF SPEAKING TREE

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Times  
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The Best of Speaking Tree -Volume 2

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### Acknowledgements

We thank all those who have contributed to the Speaking Tree column in The Times of India over the years.

First published in 2004

Fourth reprint 2007

by

Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd.

7, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg

New Delhi-110 002

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ISBN 81-903995-3-5

For sale in India only

Editing	:	Narayani Ganesh
Editorial Coordinator	:	Devlin Roy
Design	:	TGB Art
Printed and bound by	:	Nutech Photolithographers
Price	:	Rs. 200



## Preface



AN the spiritual, the transcendent, have a place in something that of necessity has to be so topical and time bound a forum as a newspaper? We in *The Times of India* believe that the answer is an emphatic 'yes'. For, we believe that the legitimate realm of the spiritual is not in sequestered monasteries or in the lofty towers of philosophical thought alone. It is very much an integral part of our lives, of our thoughts and actions, and can motivate in us right personal, social and political impulses. We cannot avoid or escape these daily Kurukshetras of the mind and the soul. All we can hope to do, as Arjuna did with the help of Krishna, is to learn to realise that while we must act in the face of moral and ethical ambiguities we can try and do so without the material attachments alone determining our actions. This is where *The Speaking Tree* provides a grove of contemplative tranquillity, a sanctuary of the spirit where we can find strength to face anew the conflicts and the confrontations that are part of our human predicament. While occasionally eminent seers have contributed to *The Speaking Tree* column, most often, it is the so-called common citizen who is the author of these pieces — which is as it should be. For the world of the spirit is not out there or invested in some teacher or guru; it is our common heritage, ours to claim and ours to nurture. Welcome to its shade.

Indu Jain

New Delhi  
August 2004







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# Motor Your Mind Towards Godhead

By Alfred Ford



COMPARE your wealth to the automobile that you drive everyday. When you are at the wheel, you have two options: You can either drive without direction or, you can drive steadily to the temple and derive long-lasting happiness. The decision is yours. So are the effects. You are the master of your destiny. You may choose to amass wealth and use it for inferior means of consumption or decide to use your resources to serve humanity and therefore, Lord Krishna.

Amassing wealth is like wanting Lakshmi to be with you always. We know that Lakshmi's natural inclination is to be with Narayana, the Supreme. So, in a way, your wealth wants to be with Narayana. Therefore, we should use our wealth for His service. Industrialists should also know that whatever they are doing to create wealth is temporary by nature. Their activities are not permanent as nothing can be taken out from this material world. But even after knowing this, many people still run after money in the wrong way — being fatally drawn to maya, or the illusory energy that binds us.

When I was very young — and idealistic — I was restless; I yearned for peace of mind. However, once I came in contact with Sri Prabhupada, I became a totally different person. My idea about life in general underwent a total transformation and I was reborn as Ambarish Das. Even today, when people ask me what I would like to be known as — given a choice between Alfred and Ambarish — I promptly say that I prefer to be addressed as Ambarish. The reason is simple: Sri Prabhupada had himself given me this name and whatever Sri Prabhupada has given me, I hold extremely close to my heart.

The Godhead's inferior energy is what we use for the gratification of our senses while the superior energy should actually be the one we concentrate upon for our elevation. Sadly, most of the time this doesn't happen and the result is there for all to see — channelling money for wrong purposes, misrepresentation of religion, confused thoughts, arousal of violence, merciless killings...the list goes on. The best example of this is Osama bin Laden. He himself is part and parcel of God and yet he is hell-bent on destroying other parts and parcels of the same Supreme Force just because of a few wrong ideals in his life.

There are other instances as well. Why do you think the richest countries — including some of the richest men — come



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up with the largest number of suicides? Why is it that the most powerful think they have everything and yet feel a sense of emptiness? People realise that true happiness doesn't come from material satisfaction. They understand that once they gain the 'biggest', the 'largest' and the 'strongest' tags, they are not really the biggest, the largest or the strongest. They gradually understand that as spiritual creatures; their material problems cannot be solved by material solutions. And it is then that they turn towards spirituality to seek solace. It is a route of natural progression that Lord Krishna has laid out for each and every one of us.

This route is just the beginning of a cosmic journey — a long, continuous one at the end of which we are assured of reaching the Lord himself and fulfilling the very purpose of our lives. In this Kaliyug, when the mind is extremely restless, the best way to continue walking along this route is through Bhakti Yoga. Even Arjuna, who was one of the greatest yogis of all times, followed this path and realised the Godhead. For us, mere mortals, Bhakti Yoga is simple to understand and easy to follow. You just need to chant 'Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Ram Ram, Hare Hare' and you are sure to reach the end of the road.

Needless to say, by then you will know who you really are.

The author, an ISKCON member, is a great-grandson of Henry Ford.  
He spoke to Sujoy Bosu in Kolkata



# Dependent Arising: The Delusion of 'I'

By Suresh Jindal



HE Buddha called attention to the two obvious and ubiquitous truths of suffering — that all sentient beings are born in suffering and all suffering has a cause — and he showed the path that can lead to its cessation. He was unique amongst humanity's spiritual guides in that he neither blamed nor credited a permanent God or Being who arbitrarily plays with us by giving us birth in such disparate conditions of poverty and wealth, good and ill health, handsome looks and ugliness. As Einstein said: "God does not play dice."

In his search for an answer to the suffering conditions of sentient beings there is no room for blind faith or 'revealed' truths. According to him, everything has to be investigated under the luminosity of logic and reason. If it does not withstand such scrutiny, it is to be rejected. The Buddha taught that the True Causes of suffering are the three poisons of attachment, aversion and ignorance. Experientially we know that other than bodily suffering, our mental and emotional suffering results from wanting to be in an uninterrupted embrace with sensual pleasures, and an aversion and hatred for objects and beings that obstruct this hedonistic warmth. Thus we want our wealth, health, fame, name, and romantic love to last forever, and we fly into a demented rage of anger, despair and hatred against anything and anybody who blocks this sensually pulsating pursuit. The commonly held belief that things are permanent is a hallucination and an illusion. This ignorance of the true nature of reality is the root delusion. This ignorance along with aversion and attachment are the three poisons that are true cause of suffering. The afflictive emotions of anger, jealousy, pride, hatred etc. are a result of our attachment to some experiences and persons and aversion to others, on the assumption that they are permanent and last forever. This deluded way of perceiving reality causes the defilements and obscurations that lead to suffering.

In the 'First Turning of the Wheel' at Sarnath, the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths. In the 'Second Turning of the Wheel' at Rajgir he taught the doctrine of Dependent Arising. He taught that phenomena are impermanent and ever in a state of dynamic flux. All produced phenomena have the three stages of their arising, abidance and dissolution. In terms of our bodies we know that 'all that lives must die'. In terms of the



cosmos, scientists tell us that even the mighty stars go from luminosity to black holes. The Buddha further taught that objects have no inherent existence. That is to say that they do not exist permanently and unchangeably from their own side. Every phenomenon arises only in dependence on causes and conditions, and therefore has no independent existence from its own side.

What we identify as a person is composed of the five aggregates of form, feelings, perception, volition or compositional factors and consciousness. What we call an 'I' and 'mine' is only a designation and a label attached to these aggregates. We all use this label as a frame for 'my' experiences. The Buddha did not say that this subjective 'I' doesn't exist, but showed that upon analysis, no actual 'self' can be found that corresponds to that experience wrapped up in a very subjective manner. The idea of a 'self' arises in dependence on the five aggregates and ceases when either one or all cease.

We tend to apprehend the 'I' as a very solid, self-existing phenomenon. We see, however, that this 'I' cannot be separated from and therefore depends on its parts, the body and mind. But the mind alone is not the 'I', and the body alone is not it either. It depends for its identity on things, which are not it. To establish it as itself we have necessarily to establish another from which it is distinguished. Like here and now; hot and cold. To distinguish one we have to have another to contrast it with. It clearly cannot be established from its own side, and depends on the point of view of who is using the term. Therefore, the 'I' depends on its parts, in contrast and from the point of view of who is using the term.

It is the false and deluded notion of an inherently existing 'I' that causes us to crave sensory pleasures and hunger for their continuation, and to have an aversion and hatred for those objects and beings that hinder or terminate this pursuit. The Buddha has shown that there is no actual entity to act as a referent to the concept of an 'I'. The 'I' has no independent existence and is therefore merely a label put on an aggregate of dependent factors. The Buddha urges us to investigate this for ourselves and not to accept it only because he says so.



# Buddhism & the Three Attributes of Being

By Sujata Ashwarya Cheema



LL religions seek to delineate a path of deliverance for human beings. However, they differ on what they promise deliverance from. Christianity promises deliverance from sin while Judaism from persecution. Hinduism believes in providing release from the repercussions of karma. Buddhism promises redemption from suffering or *dukha*. Suffering in Buddhist thought is one of the attributes of conscious existence or being. The other two attributes are impermanence (*anischaya*) and the absence of self (*anatman*). The three attributes are inextricably related and they are not propounded as doctrine but as truth that should be applied before accepting and following them.

Everything is *anischaya*, changing and therefore transient. Creation and dissolution are perpetual and ubiquitous phenomena. In the universe of *anischaya* there is no 'supreme authority' or universal fact or idea; and neither do material objects survive permanently in one state.

What is so admirable about this doctrine that deserves a thought? What are the implications of this state of being?

It means that an enlightened person accepts the turn of events in life with equanimity and repose. An end to suffering, that is life, according to Buddhist theology, comes only with the acceptance of *anischaya*. A wise man thus gives up resisting the turning of the wheels of change and finds solace in the hub where 'there is only Here and Now and This', and change causes no convulsion. Thus it is possible to find peace and happiness with a mental attitude that fosters emotional detachment (*upeksha*) towards one's actions and surroundings.

In the cosmos of *anischaya*, how can there be an unchanging self? The second sign of being is *anatman* which, transliterated, means that no 'thing' whatsoever has an *atman*. Unlike the core Hindu doctrine that believes in the soul or *atman* as the unchanging reality underlying the changing body, Buddhism denies the existence of a soul, ego or self. For Buddhism the transient perceptible body is not survived by an immutable self or soul — it teaches the doctrine of non-self.

Buddha, however, never taught that there is no Self or reincarnating entity. It is a fallacy to believe that he negated the Self, in the sense of an indescribable Absolute (on which he maintained noble silence).

The application of the *anatman* doctrine to one's daily life is a



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unique feature of the Buddhist idea of self-deliverance. The first step is to realise the distinction between Self and non-self. What is the driving force behind desire, ambition, and search for pelf, power and glory? What is the stimulus behind craving for the fruits of one's action? Is it the egotistic self or the gregarious 'higher' mind that is cleansed of Self? When it is realised that the 'I'-centric world is an illusion, an attempt by the part to negate the Whole, it will be evident that the 'self' or ego is the true cause of all suffering.

The Buddhist way to salvation is therefore the process of annihilation of self. As self dies the Self grows, and as the Self is purified, the light of Self, the knowledge of the true meaning of existence, becomes manifest.

Existence is not only characterised by impermanence and absence of self but by suffering (dukha). This avowal is related to and ensues from the other two attributes of existence. If everything is impermanent, suffering is the inevitable consequence of all experience, since it results from the consummation of one's desires or from their lack of fulfilment. Desire leads to ambition for acquiring what one does not have and to hold fast to what one does have. Both these conditions produce a continual state of inquietude and dissatisfaction, which amounts to suffering.

The factor that links the ephemerality of things to the misery of man is the latter's erroneous belief in self, the delusionary separation between self and the Whole and ignorance of Non-Duality. Man resents the application of *anischaya* to self i.e. *anatman*, and persists in the illusion of permanence of his being. Thus the appetite for self-preservation and self-aggrandisement causes the pervasiveness of dukha.

The implication is that life is One, and the varied forms are its expression. As Hegel would say everything as it were is a mask tried on by the Spirit or the Absolute. It is our ignorance *avidya* that engenders the realm of self and consequently we claim an individualised existence. When Buddha with his illumined mind talked about these attributes he meant it to be a complete philosophy of life guiding human beings to Happiness-Deliverance or *nirvana*.



# Knowledge Through Self-realisation

By Ashutoshji Maharaj



SCRIPTURES world over say that world peace shall become a reality only if each individual is at peace with himself. We are a microcosm with all the macrocosm within us. Little do we realise that rampant evil deeds are mere manifestations of the inner realm of an individual. A disturbed and violent inner core will generate only destructive and hostile thoughts. Such negative thoughts are then translated into multifarious vices — the bane of 'civilised' society. The tragedy is that we are oblivious of our true nature. The ignorance of our true divine self separates us from our Creator who is absolute truth, knowledge and bliss. God is within the body as atman or our real Self.

The present atmosphere of distrust and disharmony defies any hope of revival. The goal of global peace continues to be a mirage not because of lack of effort but due to lackadaisical and wrong approach by those who matter. Perfect world order can be ensured by establishing a harmonious relationship with divinity. In man, divinity is inherent. The crucial thing is manifestation of divinity in man so that he can become truly religious. Thereupon, divine attributes automatically flow out of an individual. According to Swami Vivekananda, this requires 'outside help' which comes from a spiritual master who has himself attained the pinnacle of human perfection. At the behest of his spiritual master, he stepped out of national boundaries and travelled to various parts of the globe, spreading the message of oneness of the human race. Speaking at various fora, he said, "It is the revelation of the supreme secret that will enable one to understand the meaning and essence of 'oneness' of humans".

Pursuit of a perfect world order has to begin with an individual. It is not the global but individualistic approach that is needed to attain the goal. Here the subject matter of our study is not the physical body of an individual but his mind which is the breeding ground for good or evil thoughts. Many of us talk of value-orientation to education to develop a positive mindset. This would have its deepest impact only after divinity in man has been manifested. This will have a two-fold impact. One is the realisation that the same divine force operates through all, and the second, that our real self is above the body-mind consciousness. It is only then that the value-oriented education



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will prove beneficial for man.

A negatively charged mindset has propensity for carrying out demoniac deeds and can stoop down to any level. A flustered and agitated mind is inimical to the interests of the family, society and the world at large. It can only sow seeds of discontent, hatred and animosity.

A positively charged mindset is thus a prerequisite for individual peace and global peace. In case the forest is withered and is to be restored to life, we would have to water each tree in that forest. Likewise, if we want world peace, we should learn to be peaceful ourselves. A positive mindset equips individuals with endowments of purity, self-control, uprightness, non-violence, truth, calmness, compassion and shuns covetousness. Such divine propensities are conducive to God-realisation and the individual remains ever established in remembrance of God.

We talk profusely of conquering fear, getting rid of self-centredness and mind-control. Words alone will not create magic. Let us sincerely ask ourselves if this has changed the obnoxious atmosphere all around. The situation has in fact gone from bad to worse. Remember, theory is best understood through practical example. On practically perceiving the self within, we would not only welcome but become receptive to theory.

Upon realising one's divine self, credos like *Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah* or all living beings should be happy and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* or the world is family, are understood in letter and spirit, and no longer remain confined to holy books. Sri Aurobindo said: "India will emerge as a spiritual teacher of the world". The time has come for India to spread the message of knowledge of self which is the only way out of the present imbroglio. Spiritual revolution through the goal of *Atmagyan* or self-knowledge, is the need of the hour. It is only *purusartha* or an object of human pursuit of the present, which would become the destiny of the future. Let us make our tomorrow peaceful by knowing ourselves.

As told to S K Vasudeva



# Viveka & Vairagya Dispel Illusion

By Ashutoshji Maharaj



EITHER the body nor the senses are real — these are only instruments of varied expressions and actions associated with the temporal world of atman, the Divine Self. It is on realising the atman that we become aware that we are essentially a fragmented part of the Universal Soul. The individual consciousness though infinite and one, is manifested infinitude of body and mind. The goal of human life is attaining oneness with the infinite.

The moot question is, how can we go about achieving this union of individual soul with the Supreme, how shall this take place? First, we have to get over the body-mind consciousness. It is this body-mind consciousness that makes our journey into the metaphysical world of ultimate reality well-nigh impossible. Until we go beyond this body-mind consciousness level, we will continue to search for meaning and fulfilment of life in the fickle realm of sensory experience. The ideal state is that state which is beyond sense-level perception, where all duality goes off. The pairs of opposites do not trouble us anymore.

The attainment of this state calls for 'outside help' which comes from a wise seer who has himself attained the pinnacle of human perfection. He is one who has himself trodden this path with success. His individual consciousness has become one with universal consciousness. Such a helper or guru alone is capable of putting us through the trans-sensuous experience of inherent divinity.

The attainment of the highest goal of human life is possible only on being blessed with knowledge of the spirit, *Brahm Vidya*. Lord Krishna in human form in *Dwapar Yuga* called *Brahm Vidya* the "supreme secret". Human beings alone are privileged to be conferred with the capacity to be able to perceive this knowledge. Realisation, however, is not something to be acquired; it comes as a revelation of the supreme secret of God. It is essentially the manifestation of the inherent divinity of man. It is the *saguna swarupa* of the Supreme Brahma who alone is capable of unfolding it to the seeker. He equips us with the worship of the spirit by the spirit.

The supreme knowledge consists of instant experience of divine light, cosmic vision, holy nectar — which are all present in plenty in the human body; as also the divine music which goes on incessantly in the human body and the echoes of the holy



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name — the primordial vibration or the divine energy chord within all. The venerated texts of vedanta have described God as divine light. As there is fire hidden in the wood and it can be produced only through a technique, in the same way, there is divine light — the energising force as atman within all which can be seen and known by all when blessed with the Divine Eye. We also need to know that holy name which is beyond any language. We should also learn the unique technique of listening to inner music which brings forth our divine attributes. It is holy nectar, amrit, akin to that which keeps a child alive in the womb of its mother.

The caterpillar gets entangled in its self-woven cocoon. Man too is caught in the clutches of his desires. Just as the caterpillar develops into a butterfly bursting the cocoon to enjoy freedom, man too can get across the mesh of illusion by using the wings of *viveka* or power to discriminate and *vairagya* or disenchantment.

A spiritual master imparts both *viveka* and *vairagya* without distinction of caste, creed or colour, even transcending physical barriers. He will not embroil you in oft-quoted different paths leading to the Supreme Spirit. He would rather teach the synthesis of all spiritual paths in a comprehensive spirituality as elucidated in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Upanishads.

Equipped with this spirituality, a man lives oblivious of body and mind consciousness and the associated *vasanas*. His individual consciousness with name and form merges into the ocean of universal consciousness.

As told to S K Vasudeva



# Cosmic Vision Alone Reveals the Truth

By Ashutoshji Maharaj



TRUE realisation takes place on knowing and seeing God in His transcendental form. It is a metaphysical experience within the human body. The manifestation of inherent divinity is in reality the revelation of the divine self of man. This is not different from the Supreme Self that permeates even the tiniest particle in the universe. It is accessible to all human beings. It is upon this trans-sensuous experience that we become truly religious.

Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Neither by study of the Vedas nor by austere penance, nor by charity, nor even by rituals can I be seen in my transcendental form, Arjuna". In an earlier verse (4.34), Krishna tells Arjuna that this *para-vidya* or knowledge of the spirit can be imparted by a wise seer and an illumined soul alone. Such a sadguru does not stuff your mind with prolific description of *atman* and *parmatman*, but one who takes you beyond the different paths of realisation.

Mere reading and recitation of religious texts and scriptures does not make one learned, nor does it help in attaining salvation. Adi Sankaracharya in the *Vivekchudamani* says: "Without taking the medicine, by just repeating the name of the medicine, no malady can be cured. Likewise, without practical perception and experience, merely repeating the words, no one can attain salvation". Both the *Kathopanishad* and the *Mundaka Upanishad* say: "The Supreme Brahma cannot be attained just by reading the scriptures and listening to religious discourses. God can neither be attained through the mind nor by logic. He is accessible only to those who have a strong craving to know and unravel the Supreme Secret and essence of God".

Sufi saint Bulle Shah asked, "One may have read many scriptures and may have a large collection of books but if there is gloom in the heart, without grace of *murshid* (guru), how can supreme bliss and fulfilment be possible?" Adi Sankara in the *Vivekchudamani* further said: "No matter how sweetly one talks, how elaborately one explains, how expertly one interprets the Vedas, if that truth is unknown, salvation is not possible. The Vedas speak of the inner world which cannot be perceived by mind, intellect and sense organs".

The *Gurbani* emphasises that one should not limit oneself to reading only but should also strive to know and attain Him. Even the 18 Puranas and the four Vedas have not been able to



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unravel the mystery of God. Had not Ravana, the demon king, mastered the Puranas and the Vedas by heart? We need to rise above dogmatic and ritualistic habits and follow the path shown by the shastras to attain salvation. Reading the holy scriptures, recitation of mantras and hymns and singing of devotional songs alone cannot make us 'religious'. In the bargain, we only end up being arrogant and grow disdainful of others.

No doubt, our holy scriptures give us a vivid account of the glory and splendour of the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent nature of the Supreme Being. The divine play in various forms at different times enacted by the Lord in His many incarnations in human garb on this Earth in His *saguna swarupa* are not presented simply to demonstrate His playfulness but have a definite purpose and meaning for all of us. The immanence and transcendence of the Supreme Brahma in human embodiment cannot be understood by mere intellect and logic. This is comprehensible only to those who have known and seen His cosmic vision.

The many incarnations and manifestations of divine power are classified as *nimit avtaars* and *nitya avtaars*. Every nimit avtaar had a definite purpose. The nitya avtaars in the form of saints and sages have always remained on earth to provide direction for a meaningful life. As a natural corollary, India abounds in holy scriptures that provide a deep insight into the immanence and transcendence of God.

The life of every individual is an unstable mixture of pairs of opposites. For most of us, everyday life is replete with trials and tribulations of varying degrees and magnitude. While the thoughtful among men seek to know the meaning and purpose of life, the ignorant ones just grumble and talk of a "cruel" God whenever in distress. Human life has a higher and nobler purpose and the destiny of a human being is to move higher up in the cosmic order to reach perfection and to realise the permanent and Supreme Bliss in the realm of God. The religious books themselves exhort human beings to know and realise the real aim of their life and not just confine themselves to ritualistic reading and recitation of scriptures.

As told to S K Vasudeva



# The Art of Living In Solitariness

By Acharya Mahaprajna



REKSHADHYANA is the knowledge of Self. Those who do not know themselves, cannot know others well. Self-realisation and *Ishwara* (God) are not dual entities. In fact, one who is *Ishwara*, is self-realised and the one who is self-realised is also *Ishwara*. Both merge together as one.

There exists a misconception in the field of western psychology, that one who is self-centred, turns out to be selfish. Spirituality or the goal of self-realisation is perceived as creating self-engrossed and selfish people who vitiate the character of society. Self-realisation may mean self-engrossment but a self-engrossed person cannot be selfish; these are two different things. A selfish person does not know his inner self.

There is an inverse relation between selfishness and self-realisation. The higher the degree of self-realisation, the lesser the selfishness. A self-realised person cannot nourish any selfish motives. A selfish man remains away from his inner self and believes only in amassing wealth. He wants to live with the mob, whereas a self-realised person knows the art of living in solitariness.

Basically there are two kinds of people, the one who knows how to live in solitariness and the other who prefers living with the mob. Those who don't know themselves, cannot enjoy the mystery of solitude and so remain away from their inner self and go along with the mob. There are actually two kinds of life worth knowing: One is solitary life and the other is living in company.

The problem of the day is in living with others, and the only solution is a life of solitariness. A self-realised person is one who internally enjoys solitude even though he might be with others externally. A selfish person is one who is internally with the mob and externally he is solitary and wants everything for himself alone.

Once selfishness is given up, there will be no impurity or dishonesty. A selfish man never cares for others whereas the one who has nurtured a solitary state in his being has empathy and compassion. In the wake of his immense sympathy with all, he thinks that everybody carries the potential for self-realisation. This feeling of egolessness can mature only in a solitary state, never among the mob. Those who live a crowded life can never penetrate into the deep recesses of their inner being.



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A poet, author or a litterateur who wishes to create works of high quality will seek out a solitary place, free from commotion and the mobs, where he can contemplate upon creative thoughts with a calm mind. Those who cherish the solitary state in their being will feel solitariness everywhere in the cosmos. There remains no more confused thoughts or chaos. This solitary state is Ishwara.

The first and also the most important objective of *dharma* is to impart the knowledge of solitariness. How to create solitariness in our being? Sometimes, when we sit, all alone, then too we experience a rush of memories and daydreams, flowing like the waters of a stream. We have a tremendous rush of thoughts — amidst all these thoughts, if anyone manages to achieve solitariness in his being, then he is most fortunate and blessed.

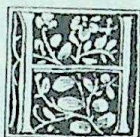
That person alone can have solitariness who has tried to know his inner Self. Knowing the inner Self means: "I am not the body, not the imagination, not memories and not thoughts. I am the inner Self, the being and soul which is separate from imagination, memories and thoughts".

The inner Self can never be identified with imagination, memories and thoughts.



# The Small Boy And the Leaf

By Vinay Kamat



He was a small, thin boy with a mole on his face. But what he told our seventh standard class many years ago still bothers me. The moral science teacher had given us homework. We had been asked to pen an essay on 'happiness'. We all thought it was easy. But when we started writing it, we realised our limitations.

Some of us wrote about the happy moments surrounding birthdays; some spoke of the emotional highs on getting a first in class; others remembered kites and whoops of joy. But the small, thin boy saw nothing in the events that excited us. Nothing at all. He was uninterested.

Yes, he was an oddity. He was often lost in his own thoughts though he appeared calm. He asked too many questions, and he answered them himself. He seemed to be searching for a friend and had found one in himself.

His essay on 'happiness' was strange — at least it appeared so at that time. I did not know how to respond to it. Here's what I can recollect from his singular essay: "I do not know what happiness is. I can't define it. Is it a mood? Is it a thought? Is it about innocence? It's difficult. But I did feel happy last Wednesday when I opened my window...

"The atmosphere was right, there was a light breeze. Just across the window was a cashew tree, it was swaying gently. Something was building within me. And, then, a bright yellow leaf started falling. It circled and circled and fell. I don't know what happened, but I felt nice. It was a positive feeling. I smiled. Yes, you could say, I felt happy. I had never felt like that before."

The class of 1977 was certainly dazed. Happiness? Leaf? Small, thin boy with an attitude? If there were any doubts about the eccentricity of the small, thin boy, the essay had put them to rest.

Years have gone by and I still think about the falling leaf and my classmates. Are we taking our lives for granted? Do we see magic in the ordinary? Or are we wasting our time chasing the extraordinary? Are we searching for something that is right in our midst in our very selves? Have we found it?

Just imagine what the lonely leaf has set off. It is a symbol of life itself, a friend tells me when I recount the incident of the small, tiny boy. Another interprets it as childlike innocence. The falling leaf, like life, is serendipity, says another friend. "It's everything — and nothing."



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Indeed, the small, thin boy was explaining cosmic serendipity in his own way. If life is an accident, then let's view it as such. Let living itself be a moment of happiness, however small or large that instant is.

At the end of the seventh standard term, I had numerous meetings with the small, thin boy. One day he was franker than ever: "I have often wondered what it's to experience a world without life. I have tried it and found it extremely disturbing. Even as there is a moment of happiness in seeing a leaf, there is sadness in experiencing a world without a leaf. And I am just beginning to understand it..."

"Reasoning, intelligence, wisdom, experience, imagination are fine. But they will never help you experience a falling leaf. It has to do with awareness," the boy said. I realise now that he was referring in his way to consciousness.

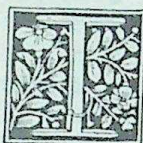
It's an inner voyage that he had undertaken at a very young age. He had realised then that a leaf is not a leaf; that we must understand ourselves to understand what's beyond us; that awareness delimits our mind; and that awareness, unlike memory, is self-effacing. For there can never be individual awareness.

Yet, many years later, I only remember one cosmic individual and a falling leaf.



# Love Unconditionally For We are Family

By Nancy R Stonack



Is there a 'how to' manual of integration into daily life? Where does the average seeker find stability in spiritual growth? Many a spiritual seeker is becoming aware that he is more than his physical body. There is a deep craving to understand their calling. The revival of ancient wisdom is growing and that growth is having an effect on the way we perceive spirituality.

My awakening as a clairvoyant and spiritual healer forced me to find a way of integrating it all into my traditional nursing clinical setting. I began a journey to seek out ancient indigenous cultures that I could relate to. My journey took me first into my own backyard, to the rich culture of native American Indians. The *Puyallup* Indian tribe in Tacoma, Washington, taught me that there is spirit in everything — the earth, sky, wind, Sun, rocks, trees and animals. They also taught me to look at the symbolism in everything.

Hawaiian culture reflects compassion and love in all activity. *Aloha* means 'with breath and life'. In ancient times the Hawaiians could tell the health of an individual through their breath and smell. When a person is ill the Hawaiian *Kahunas* believe that the entire family needs to come for healing because illness affects the entire family.

The *Maoris* of New Zealand are well known for their psychic healing powers. They have known that the energy of your thoughts decides what you will create. The *Maoris* know the power of creative visualisation and also that they have a powerful spirit in a physical body. They also honour their ancestors and land as sacred.

Dr Rose Pere, *Maori* healer and medicine woman, says that in the *Maori* culture they are taught to heal in ways by which the healer receives while they are giving and healing — a circle of energy is formed between the two. She states that in America the healers keep giving and then exhaust themselves.

The aborigines of Australia taught me the benefits of total, unconditional love. Bob Randall is an aborigine elder who is the keeper and owner of a sacred site of *Uluru* (Ayers Rock). He always radiates joy from his energy field. He says the secret is simple. The secret is love. When I asked, how do you radiate love when you do not always feel 'loving', he said: "Begin with yourself. Love yourself unconditionally no matter what happens. Just make a commitment to love yourself." He



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continued: "Once you have found that a bit easier, then commit to love your partner, then your children, and others." It seemed so simple. The aborigine healers talked about the ancient tradition of listening to the sounds of the body and diagnosing someone as healthy or ill based on what they would hear.

My experience as a healer is enriched with a deeper understanding of my connection to myself, and my environment, which includes my clients. Each ancient culture has influenced me in my heart and soul. Each experience deepens my ability to connect with the rich creative power of Mother Earth, and the cosmic forces that flow through my very being. I dare to open my heart more to the wonders that I hold inside myself without fear. My relationship with indigenous cultures enhances my courage to reconnect with my own ancient wisdom that with each breath becomes more alive.

Today, we are in need of this wealth of knowledge more than at any other time in our history. We are spiritual beings and are guided by symbols and experiences in everything we do. Ancient stories and traditions enrich our lives. Embracing this richness can only enhance our experiences in this life and others to come. After all, aren't we family?



## Portrait of Messiah As a 'Monster'

By Jug Suraiya



OW can one make a murderous psychopath who not only kills his victims but eats them, sometimes alive, into a cult hero? What kind of civilisation celebrates such a creation? These questions form the subtext of Thomas Harris's recently released, sensationally successful international bestseller, *Hannibal*, the long-awaited sequel to *The Silence of the Lambs*, which since its publication 10 years ago has become a classic of horror fiction. The fiendishly brilliant Dr Hannibal Lecter, Hannibal the Cannibal, who escaped from a high security prison for the criminally insane to help an FBI agent track down a particularly savage serial killer, has achieved the status of a sacred monster, an evil genius par excellence. He follows in the footsteps of Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov who tried to pick up the Nietzschean gauntlet: If God is dead, we must turn ourselves into gods. But while Dostoyevsky's anti-heroes recanted or were destroyed for their blasphemous masquerade, the good Dr Lecter goes on from strength to satanic strength. In his sequel, *Hannibal*, author Harris tries to show us how and why this should be so.

Lecter attempts to turn away from his destiny of blood and violence and become a harmless academic in Tuscany. An urbane polymath, he is eminently qualified for the job; in a superb sequence, he mentally composes in just three minutes a talk on Dante's *Inferno* that dumbfounds a roomful of hostile scholarly critics. But his vengeful enemies will not let him be. Financed by a hate-crazed, disfigured megalomaniac who delights in the vicious torment of little children, a group of mercenary killers, aided by corrupt cops and venal politicians, seek him out to feed him live to wild pigs specially bred for the purpose; an apposite case of casting a pearl before swine. Once again Hannibal is drawn back into his grisly karma of cruelty and violent death. The blood-drenched story is not for the faint of heart or stomach. But this gothic facade conceals a moral and metaphysical quest. Haunted by a childhood trauma when he witnessed his baby sister being literally consumed by the bestialities of war, Hannibal has transformed himself into the ultimate Other, the 'monster' of the Judeo-Christian tradition starting from Lucifer, Milton's *Star of the Morning*, who arraigned himself in dubious battle against the hosts of heaven. The Puritan poet nearly turned the magnificent archangel into



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a romantic rebel and the hero of his epic, before realising what he was unconsciously doing and pulling up short. Hannibal's creator is in no such danger of a moral double-take.

In an end-of-millennium world where humankind's insatiable appetite has literally devoured *Gaia*, the earth mother (a voracity which finds a macabre metaphor in Lecter's symbolic cannibalism), where the destruction of entire peoples and the torture of children are routine statistics, evil has become the banal order of the day. In this insidious regime of spiritual acedia, there are no sinners or saints left. Only all of us who acquiesce by omission or commission in this universal moral lobotomy.

Hannibal's crusade, his unholy grail, is to counter evil with even greater evil, the only deadly prescription to quicken our deadened souls. Faust-like, he tries to reverse the process of time and history, to stay the endless drift of entropy into chaos by creating an alternative cosmology of his own, an endless and eternal 'palace of the imagination'.

The dilemma that Hannibal poses to his readers, primarily in the West, is: What is the necessary antithesis, the counterpoise to this alternative cosmology? If there is no good, how can there be an evil, let alone an evil that overcomes non-existent evil? Caught in the unbridgeable cleft of duality that is the bedrock of the Western tradition, Hannibal's readers may well flounder in this metaphysical chasm. The protagonist himself should not. Though he appears not to have confided as much to his chronicler, Harris, Dr Lecter may well be an aspiring Shiv bhakt, a tantric yogi trying to pierce the veil of terror and joy, destruction and creation. He still has a long way to go, and knows it. Perhaps, in his next avatar he might take a tip from the lines of a fellow American, a poet:

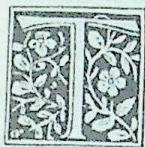
"If the red slayer thinks he slays/ Or if the slain thinks he is slain/ They know not well the subtle ways/ I keep, and pass, and turn again.../ The strong gods pine for my abode/ And pine in vain the sacred seven/ But thou, meek lover of the good!/ Find me, and turn thy back on heaven."

His many acolytes can only hope that Hannibal finds his moksha the next time round.



# Listen Carefully to Sounds of Silence

By Narayani Ganesh



THE right to speak is often evoked to illustrate the superlative degree of evolution of a truly democratic people. The more vocal you are at meetings, at public functions or even social gatherings, the greater your perceived value as a keen-minded person, ready to express your opinion. In expressing yourself verbally, you perforce have to take an 'either or' position — in strategic defence-related matters, you are either a 'hawk' or a 'dove'. If the debate is on new developments in science and technology, you're either 'pro-life' or 'pro-choice'. If you're talking about exploitation of women, you're either 'feminist' or 'anti-feminist'. In our zeal to be seen as being either 'pro' or 'anti' something, we often tend to lose sight of the larger picture. This larger picture can be seen only if one looks at things from a wider perspective rather than in a limited context.

US president George Bush, in his much publicised address to a joint session of Congress, declared, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make — either you're with us, or you're with the terrorists". This leaves no space for a large number of 'nations' and individuals who oppose terrorism but want to distance themselves from Washington's war plans as well.

The significance of silence is often underestimated. Silence does not necessarily mean ignorance or even concurrence. It could well mean a desire to distance oneself from the situation in order to get a clearer view of the larger picture. Silence provides a chance to reflect and understand, so that greater comprehension and a wider, liberating perspective can help douse the flames of anger and revenge rather than fan and spread them, leading to more violence and unhappiness.

Sage Ashtavakra, while talking about liberation in life, explains to King Janaka that it is only when we rise above duality, above doubts and fears, that we attain true freedom. The sage asks, "Where is the world and where is the aspirant for liberation; where is the contemplative man and where is the man of knowledge; where is the soul in bondage and where is the liberated soul for me who is non-dual by nature? Where are creation and destruction; where are seeker and success for me abiding in my non-dual nature? Where is the knower, the means to knowledge, the object of knowledge, or knowledge



itself; where is anything, and where is nothing for me who am ever pure?"

Swami Nityaswarupananda explains Ashtavakra's philosophy thus: He accepts the reality of the Self, alone. There is no world. Nothing exists besides the Self. There is no appearance, even, for appearance is brought about by ignorance; and the negation of appearance can only take place in ignorance. Yet, Ashtavakra does not recognise ignorance either, for the assertion of ignorance implies the existence of something other than the Self. He does not recognise either bondage or liberation. Thought creates bondage, and liberation is consequent on the thought of bondage. But true knowledge transcends this cobweb of thought.

In truth, there is neither bondage nor liberation; these are only states of mind. The Self is ever free, unaffected by any state of mind. Thus, according to Ashtavakra, there is but One Reality, the infinite, indivisible Self which is Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute.

Ashtavakra and gurus like Swami Nityaswarupananda are evolved enough to talk about the significance of liberation and silence in pure metaphysical terms; as tools that open our consciousness to the ultimate Truth. However, for those of us who are engaged in more mundane matters, the virtues of silence are still significant, though in a less cosmic context.

Silence is certainly useful as a valuable tool that can help sharpen the mind; to help us reflect in solitude and take stock. Christian scriptures often describe silence as "an aid to the practice of good" since an unguarded tongue dissipates the soul, distracting the mind from concentration and comprehension — or to put it in spiritual terminology, from prayer and meditation. In a way, silence is a wholesome penance since it involves self-denial and restraint. Even Pythagoras is said to have imposed a strict rule of silence on his disciples.

For the uninitiated, observing a two minutes' silence — as we did recently after the New York and Washington attacks — is a symbolic act of respect for the departed. But with a little effort, silence can be to the spirit what sleep is to the body; silence can rest the mind, and silence can be more profound in its eloquence than even the longest talkathon ever telecast or even the most enduring filibuster witnessed in Parliament. Of a distinguished general it was said that "he could hold his tongue in 10 languages". In times of crises like now, when words spoken in anger and haste can well lead to conflicts that can destroy the world, it might be a good idea to draw inspiration from the virtues of silence.



# Spiritual Realisation Is Beyond Theory

By Ashutoshji Maharaj



MODERN philosophers, intellectuals, clerics, theologians and ecclesiastical giants have said and written a lot on ways and means of God-realisation. Whatever they say by way of advancing theories and treatises contain only verbal instruction. Theory is not capable of producing the desired results. Theory sans practical experience of divinity inherent in a human being is like stuffing peoples' minds with prolific descriptions of *atman* and *paramatman* only to eventually be confronted with questions like where is He? How I can see Him? Did verbal instructions and assurances by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* pacify Arjuna? No, they did not.

In chapters one to 10 of the *Gita*, Lord Krishna replied to a plethora of questions from Arjuna. This constituted *shiksha* — verbal education. The replies, however, did not satisfy an agitated, confused and wavering Arjuna. Krishna's replies generated further queries. Although the answering authority was the Lord himself, even then verbal knowledge could not satisfy, convince and pacify an indecisive Arjuna. Until then, Arjuna identified Krishna as a mere physical body. All exhortations and teachings of the Lord did not have a lasting effect. This was in reality a divine sport of the supreme *Brahma* in human embodiment. He wanted to show humankind that attainment of God is beyond verbal knowledge, and actually belongs to the realm of practical experience.

Eventually, the Lord blessed Arjuna with the divine eye to make him see His cosmic form. Physical eyes can just see the outward form. The inner soul can only be perceived by the eye of the spirit. The celestial vision is not a mental construct but the revelation of the metaphysical truth, beyond the finite mind and intellect. On seeing the vision of God through *Divya Chakshu* or divine eyes, our horizon widens and we move beyond the earthly tumults and sorrows that mesmerise us so easily.

A human being is fundamentally and essentially divine in nature. However, the divinity in man is shrouded and veiled by the endless chain of thoughts and desires. But these thoughts and desires can be eliminated. Vedanta envisages removal of encrustation of incessant flow of thoughts and desires and unfolding of inherent divinity of man. Atman or the real self of man constitutes the invisible energising force within. It is



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only on knowing and realising the indwelling spirit within, that our compulsive habit of identifying ourselves with the gross body, mind and intellect ceases.

Theory followed by practical experience truly confirm, affirm and solidify the abstract truth that is sought to be instructed. Simply knowing that the supreme spirit dwells in all beings as atman is not sufficient. It is the vision in practical sense which would arouse unflinching faith. So we need some outside help that can give the abstract metaphysical truth a visible reality. This outside help comes from the perfect spiritual master of the time who has himself known and seen the metaphysical form of God by unravelling the profoundest mystery.

The cosmic vision like the one experienced by Arjuna is not a myth or a legend. We know of other such cosmic visions akin to the vision of Arjuna. To quote a few of them from other lands — the vision of Saint Joan of Arc, Constantine's vision, vision of St Saul and St Hildegard and transfiguration of Jesus.

Vedanta is the science of life. While the outside physical world of objects is the domain of the physical science, the field of study of Vedanta is the inner world. Our inner realm is beyond the comprehension of sense organs, gross body, subtle mind and intellect. The ground on which a physical science claims superiority over other streams of secular knowledge is that its theories are based on and verifiable through laboratory tests. The spirituality contained in the vedantic treatises is not merely the delight and ecstasy of academicians and philosophers. The domain of Vedanta is the metaphysical world of ultimate reality.

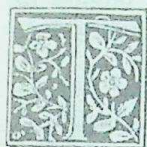
Until one sees the cosmic vision within oneself, one will not comprehend the true essence of the cosmic process and destiny. The vision is the revelation of the inherent divinity in man. This super-sensuous experience is instant and spontaneous in every aspirant at the time of *diksha* or initiation. Not that it happened only in the remote past. It is possible even today provided one has the urge in his or her heart.

The author is the founder, Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthan, New Delhi



# Journalists Need a Loving Detachment

By Vikas Singh



HERE'S this story about a writer who drifted into journalism. Sent to a distant island to cover a civil war, he happily lazed around in a beach house, watched spectacular sunrises and breathtaking sunsets, and occasionally heard the distant 'musical' rumble of guns. He faithfully recorded all this, and was promptly sacked for missing the 'big story'. But while he was an utter failure as a journalist, wasn't he an astute observer of the relative truth of the waking state?

An old Latin saying insists that men want to deceive themselves. And there is no deception more seductive — some would say more necessary — than the quest for 'meaning', both in life and work. We've been conditioned to believe that there are few callings more noble than medicine. And yet, leading neurosurgeon Anup Kohli once observed in a moment of angst, "We doctors can rehabilitate someone below par, not take him above par. We can grade coma, not consciousness. We know about morbidity, not about health." Doctors may win many battles with the Grim Reaper, but they'll always lose the war. They have their limitations, but recognising this reality would deprive many of motivation, perhaps depress them. So, they are taught to studiously ignore the truth and never let their students stumble upon it.

Journalism, similarly, has its limitations. The realm of philosophy and literature is trends and processes. That of journalism is events and accidents. That straightaway locks journalists into tunnel vision. A newspaper is invariably human-centric in its view of the cosmos; obsessed with the power play of a single nation, and only the inimical actions of its enemies. Like a surgeon's incision gone astray, it slashes and subordinates a 5,000-year civilisation into many nations, each bent on self-aggrandisement to the other's detriment. It ignores the fact that these nations have been around for barely one per cent of the civilisation's span; that individuals increasingly outlive nations (a person born in East Bengal before 1947 would by now have been successively Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, to cite just one example).

But does that mean a media person cannot be emotionally detached from his work? Politicians would find that hard to believe. They are convinced that the media must necessarily be biased; that publishers always have an ideological bent; that



political events and power games cannot ever be a matter of supreme indifference to a pressperson. Tell them there are people who believe in the *dharma* of detachment, who do not observe events through the blinkers of ideology or even preference, who will treat each issue on its merit — assuming it is worth taking note of — and they will simply goggle in disbelief, then renew their efforts to unilaterally co-opt you into their artificial constructs.

Many associated with media are fully aware that today's all-important story will be tomorrow's nine-day, or 9/11 wonder; that they will inevitably be following up one piece of sensationalism with another. And that eventually, in the cosmic scheme of things, as galaxies are born and snuffed out, none of this is real. They recognise this, but they work on nevertheless.

Why? Because a journalist — or for that manner, any human — is, in many ways, like the driver in the midst of spectacular mountain scenery, on a hazardous road with many hairpin bends. Negotiating the drive consumes attention. But preoccupation with the here and now must not erase the larger picture from one's consciousness. Everyday, reminders are needed that the road is not all there is; that it is just a fragment of the overall scenery — and that's the purpose of columns such as these.

Whitehead famously distinguished between two broad forms of perceiving the world. One was the so-called empirical western way, based on 'presentational immediacy'. The other, the so-called intuitive eastern way, based on what he called 'causal efficacy'. Imagine you are in a dark room. The empiricist would grope around, identifying objects through touch, in order to orient himself. The other would simply put on the light and take in everything in a single glance. Most of us journalists are like the empiricist, groping for 'facts' in a dark room. How can we illuminate our vision and be a seer of the whole situation in a moment of insight?

Even if we journalists must condemn our readers to see the world through the prism of destruction, we can do so with a loving detachment — rather than the morbid attachment we seek to instil. An occasional confession in small print like this reveals the perverse nature of our contract with you, dear reader. Perhaps it will also inspire more of us to strive and achieve the ideal outlined by high scriptural tradition: "No vision can grasp him, but his grasp is over all vision."



# Constant Conflict In Life's Matrix

By Narayani Ganesh



POLITICS and the concept of a global identity are two artificial constructs dominating our collective consciousness today. Politics is by no means restricted to the ruling class; it is present in all spheres of human activity, whether in matters relating to family, educational institutions, community or even faith. Politics has become a ubiquitous part of our lives.

Yet, the politics of governance has somehow come to appropriate a major portion of our consciousness. Nowhere is this more evident than in the way the media accords prime space to political news and analysis — at the local, provincial, national and international levels, with greater emphasis on the 'nation'.

Here, it is instructive to distinguish nationalism from patriotism. While the former gives expression to intense chauvinistic ideals, the latter is inspired by a deep-rooted affinity for one's civilisation and people. A nationalist professes undying allegiance to his nation. Therefore he would find it impossible to love another nation or its nationalists. Patriotism, on the other hand, is born of a deeper feeling of togetherness and bonding of a people in a particular civilisation/heritage. Hence a patriot would fully understand and appreciate similar sentiments in another patriot of a civilisation/heritage different from his own.

The nation is a construct that is, at best, a transient instrumentality. It is a tool designed for a specific purpose — good governance — to oil the wheels of the many components that constitute our lives. All these components that make up the matrix of human life are equally vulnerable to constant conflict. But, somehow, we've promoted politics of the state to a dominant level in our consciousness, relegating all the rest to inferior positions. Can this be justified?

A P J Abdul Kalam's statement that "the nation is larger than the individual", made front page news. No one can dispute the logic of this statement, but why stop with the nation? We could take this further to include the individual, family, community, planet and solar system into the all-encompassing cosmos. After all, the cosmos is larger than all these components, so why restrict our consciousness to the nation? Or to the globe, as did Sir Vidya Naipaul, when he declared, "I see myself as a global citizen". By restricting ourselves to



being conscious of only a few fundamental components, we are denying ourselves a far more exciting and fulfilling possibility — that of reaching for higher levels of consciousness, an endeavour that's central to Indian spirituality.

However, once we attain cosmic consciousness, there is only one way to go from there: back to the individual self. The self which was our starting point was the physical (body) self; the one we arrive at after journeying upwards would be the Supreme Self — variously referred to as the soul, the atman, the 'I'. All the various components, including the cosmos, are believed to be present in this 'I'. Infinity itself is subsumed into the space that lies within us, in the 'I'.

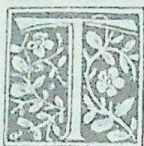
The Self is eternal, unchanging, intransient. Therefore everyone, particularly the governing class, needs to be educated on the nature of this Supreme Consciousness. This is the central theme of the *Yoga Vasishta*. "In the vision of sages who have self-knowledge, no changes whatsoever have taken place in consciousness", explains Sage Vasishta to Sri Rama, prince of Ayodhya, who, despite being an avatar of Vishnu, needed to be reminded of the supreme truth.

How does one recognise Supreme Consciousness? It comes with the cultivation of detachment; a state of extreme and supreme dispassion, says Vasishta. At this point, all components of the life-matrix become part of non-reality. Ultimately, there remains only one reality: the Self.



# Are Religious People Social Misfits?

By Sadhu Vishwamurtidas



HE materialist often views a religious person as being unsociable, dogmatic and lacking in intellectual insight. There is a certain perception that 'religious' people don't drink or smoke; they pray before every meal, frown at the free mixing of the sexes, are superstitious, impractical and way behind the times. Hence religious people are looked upon as social misfits.

In schools and colleges, students who wear religious marks on their forehead or who recite prayers or shlokas are often subject to ridicule by fellow students. Sometimes they may even be physically attacked for their religious beliefs.

Unfortunately, there have been several cases where people who proclaim intense loyalty to their religion have actually indulged in acts of violence and terror. This has further strengthened the social stigmatisation of 'religious' people. Whether the 'religious' overtly profess their faith on the campus, or at the workplace, peer groups dub them as social misfits. In extreme cases, fundamentalists, through acts of terrorism, only alienate themselves further from society.

A religious person has to take care to tread a path which allows him to follow his beliefs in spite of living in an environment that is not exactly conducive to his endeavour. The worldly person, in contrast, is a social chameleon who incessantly changes his colours to match his surroundings. He is highly adaptable to change. He can turn from capitalist to communist, friend to foe, Jekyll to Hyde, according to the demands of the moment, if only to ensure that his own interests are protected.

In such an environment, it becomes very difficult for a religious person to be accepted as being normal, especially because the chameleon-characteristic is absent in him. Hence he is a misfit. But, the 'religious social misfit' knows that one day, the world will turn to his way of thinking. He sees everybody as being essentially spiritual, they having become sensual only superficially. However, the religious person understands that though he may be a social misfit, others are misfits of a different kind. They are spiritual misfits. They do not fit into the wider, more important, spiritual scheme of things.

The more we broaden our horizons on the physical level, the more spiritual we become. The awareness of the infinite Cosmos and its miniature parallel, the human body, and the realisation



that everything consists of pure energy, brings about feelings of profound spirituality. This is the reason why great scientists like Albert Einstein were drawn to mysticism.

On his return to Earth, the first Indian in space, Captain Rakesh Sharma, revealed that he felt a sense of awe when he saw our wonderful blue globe suspended in infinite space. "Our planet looked so beautiful!" he said, "but I just couldn't believe people were fighting down there".

We live in an age that plays host to a spectrum of human diversity unprecedented in history: a thousand languages, as many cultures, seven major religions divided into a hundred thousand schisms and theologies, and all this with a growing mixed ethnicity. With advances in communications and transport, the globe has become smaller. The scale of interaction of people from different races, regions and communities is unprecedented. Many individuals in countries like the US, for instance, live in the throes of an identity crisis because of a bewildering combination of relatives. Today, an American could have a white mother, black father, Hispanic uncle, Chinese aunt and Irish grandparents. Misfits abound all about us. And that means we too are misfits amongst them. Today, everyone is a misfit.



# Poetry as Postcards From the Edge

By Jug Suraiya



N the film *Il Postino*, the village postman gives the girl he loves a poem he passes off as his own, though it has been written by Pablo Neruda, living in exile in the small Italian community. When Neruda berates the postman, the young man replies: "Just because you wrote the poem, that doesn't mean it belongs to you. Poetry belongs to those who need it."

Patent attorneys may be scandalised by such a laissez-faire interpretation of copyright laws. But by his response, the postman reveals that he might have a greater insight into the nature and ownership of poetry than the poet himself. Who does 'own' poetry? The person who creates it? Or those who make it a part of the living air, a common legacy with which to give utterance to voiceless longings? To whom does the fragrance of the rose belong? The flower, or the passing traveller enraptured by its scent?

As a struggling writer in Buenos Aires, Borges would enter workingmen's bars and slip unsigned copies of his writings into the pockets of jackets hanging by the door. Nor would he hang about outside, to see what fate befell his clandestine literary offerings. Borges had realised what too few writers do. That what a writer writes lives, if at all, not on a page, but on the sheet of silence that is another's mind. If this is true of poets and writers, who must deal with the clumsy pen-and-ink limitations of their craft, how much more so for those who express what cannot be said yet cannot be left unsaid, the wordless lyricists whom the world calls spiritual masters?

"Please go from here. Go away and don't listen to me," J Krishnamurti would exhort the disciples who flocked to hear him speak. Like Borges, or the fictive Italian postman, Krishnamurti knew that what he had to say had no meaning — unless others took it away from him and made it into their own, each according to their individual needs. Kierkegaard would have approved wholeheartedly. For the Danish philosopher, truth was subjectivity. To the extent you absorbed, or internalised, someone else's teachings, you expropriated what was taught, taking from it what you needed. Could this lead to a perverse solipsism, based on a deliberate misunderstanding of another's words, as happened in the case of the Nazi takeover of Nietzschean philosophy? It could, certainly. But the Nazi who was true to himself — in the Kierkegaardian sense, if such an



impossibility were possible. Could not Santa Nicandro, or even Hitler, responsible for his Nazism, no more than the true Buddhist would hold Buddha responsible for his Buddhism. There is of course a cosmological world of difference between Nazism and Buddhism, or any spiritual discipline. Fascism is premised on the principle of an idolised Fuhrer demanding obedience. Spiritualism, including the verbalised variety called poetry, is premised on the universality of autonomy.

He who claims to follow me does not follow me, said the Zen master, for a follower presumes a followed, and both are illusory. By the same token, that which says it is the Tao is not the Tao. The Italian postman might add the postscript: This poem does not belong to the poet, or to me, but to all the countless lovers, through all the ages, who ever have need of it.

What of the poetry of pure consciousness that lies behind the words of a Christ, a Nanak, a Mahavir, a Mohammed? Can that unwritable poetry, which begins where words end, belong only to them and their followers, or to all who choose to make it their own?

The village postman wouldn't bother to reply to that. He'd knock and leave on the doorstep for us to discover, postcards from the edge, with no address of sender or recipient, both of whom are one, and everyone.



# Why I Never Read What I Write

By Jug Suraiya



RECENTLY, two colleagues wrote a very fine piece describing how different readers related with the newspaper, and it in turn with them. In conclusion, the writers suggested that the reader's relationship with the paper was like Arjuna's dialogue with Krishna. An analogy which could be extended to encompass Krishna not just as Arjuna's coach-cum-cheerleader but also Krishna in his awesome *Vishwaroopa* manifestation: Myriad-headed trampler of universes, lord of the cosmos beyond chaos or creation. Aghast at the limitless immensity revealed to him, an immensity not out there but within himself, Arjuna falls prostrate before the vision.

This won't do. There's a battle to be fought. Krishna reverts to his user-friendly morph. Having looked into the towering abyss of infinite possibility within, Arjuna gets over his fit of nit-picking quibbles. Go get 'em, old son; only do so without fear or love of defeat or victory, enjoins Krishna. And, like *Nike*, Arjuna goes out and just does it. The rest, as they say, is mythology.

Like Arjuna, all of us have our daily Kurukshetras to deal with. And often, our friendly neighbourhood Krishna is our newspaper. In his *Nike* avatar, not in his *Vishwaroopa* manifestation: A teeming and everlasting emptiness of pure consciousness which in newspaper terms would be the blank margin that lies above the masthead, a terrifying glimpse into the boundless chasm of the cosmos. We cannot live with pure consciousness. It would burn us out, 40 watt bulbs lit with the blinding incandescence of a billion suns. Lying on the comforting green of grass, the poet raised a languid hand to the clouds far above — "And I screamed as my fingers touched the sky." Confined in our necessary, everyday lives, we must — under pain of madness or *moksha* — dwarf the cosmic Krishna within us. In Beckett's words, we seek to escape the anguish of being in the distraction of existence. Or as Gurdjieff put it, we spend 90 per cent of our conscious lives in 'self-forgetting'. Not 'self' as in discrete, manufactured ego, but 'self' as in unrealised stardust, spore of a countless supernovae.

Don't even think about it. It'll make you bonkers. The plenum void of the margin above the masthead. Fill it up with something, anything. Doodle a refutation of Newtonian gravity or Einsteinian relativity. Or a cure for piles. Or lover's phone



number. Better still, let others do the good thing for you, below the masthead. Let them structure a world for you in which there are wars to be fought, elections to be won or lost, scams to be uncovered, stock markets to watch, heroes to celebrate, villains to hiss, political and economic crises to weather.

Newspaper reports are called 'stories' — fabricated remedies for fabricated maladies. Placebos to help us forget, or temporarily misremember, the Damocles' sword of our infinitude. "There will be time, there will be time/To prepare a face to meet the faces you meet;/ There will be time to murder and create.../ Time for you and time for me.../ Before the taking of a toast and tea." Read all about it in the papers.

Not that all papers are similar. Far from it. 'Angry' papers with 'angry' readerships will 'diagnose' drastic stories, journalistic counterparts of terminal cancer, which require ruthless surgery. 'Soft' papers with 'soft' readerships will devise mild, non-life threatening ailments like measles or the common cold. No cure for either but patience and rest. With time, even this shall pass, the parent tells the child with mumps. Or as Krishna asked Arjuna before the battle: "In this what cause for sorrow?"

He'd have made a good news editor, Krishna, in his rent-a-charioteer form. And as Vishwaroopa? Why, a publisher, of course. Who creates a demand and then fulfils it. Which is why I never read what I write, including this.



# Mathematics and the Calculus of Humour

By Jug Suraiya



HE mathematics of humour, or the humour of mathematics? You're kidding. They're as different as chalk and cheese. Or are they?

We're familiar with those witty mathematical puzzles which delight children of all ages. We speak of a comedian's sense of 'timing', a term suggestive of arithmetical calibration. We talk of jokes that 'click', like tumblers falling into place in a numerical combination lock.

Like mathematics, humour is a blueprint for an alternative reality. The world of our senses — the curve of the horizon, the rising and setting of sun and moon, the flexion of a blade of grass — can be replicated in purely mathematical terms. If you had never seen a sphere in your life, a mathematician could by a series of co-ordinates create a perfect globe in your mind. If you had never heard the music of a waterfall, you would be able to 'hear' it by reading mathematical notation. The scent of a rose, the sweetness of honey, are routinely replicated in mathematical formulae. The world deconstructed, and reconstructed as theorem.

A mathematician is a poet, of a world made not of matter but number. In modern science, Newton was the Kalidas among mathematicians. His *Principia Mathematica* outlined the movement of all bodies, from stars to billiard balls, the dance of the cosmos choreographed in elegant equations.

Then came a Swiss patent clerk and cracked the shortest mathematical dirty joke in millennia:  $E=MC^2$ . Einstein's hyper-reality imploded Newton's universe. 'Reality' was suddenly not as 'real' as it 'really' seemed. Mathematical science began to echo mysticism. That's not the end of the story. Mathematicians like Godel have suggested that the 'reality' of numbers ( $2+2=4$ ) is itself suspect, riddled with inexplicable worm-like 'loops' that make a mockery of the firm ground of mathematical certitude we so confidently tread.

All right. So mathematics is a 'funny' business. But how does it relate to humour? I'd say the two spring from a common matrix: they both provide a view of things other than as they seem to be. The world is not the sum of all things but only the sum of all sums, says the mathematician. Don't look now, but you've just made a pun, adds the humorist. Implying that even as the mathematician was playing tricks with numbers, numbers have been playing tricks with him.



The make-believe world of magic is where mathematics and humour meet. In real life, a cat whose head is twisted round will die. In cartoon films, a cat's head can get twisted round and set right simply by the hyper-logic of twisting it round in the opposite direction. The child claps with delight. He knows the cartoon is not 'real'; he cannot go twisting cat's head with impunity. But the cartoon's surreality appears more logically appealing than 'reality'. After all, why should there be dead cats? Why should there be death? And what to do about it? Turn it the other way round so it goes away?

The magician saws in half the box containing his lady assistant. The child knows the magician is playing a trick on reality. A panel on the box opens, showing not one lady, but two. The child laughs louder. If 'reality' is an 'illusion', the 'illusion' is also an illusion. Like mathematics, humour is a progressive questioning of the 'real'.

The child laughs at the naked emperor attired in his 'new clothes'. The child sees that the snobbery of fashion is an illusion. Suppose a cartoonist added a Grim Reaper walking behind the nude emperor carrying an X-ray showing that the strutting monarch has a terminal disease. The philosopher would laugh, for the addition suggests that not just our clothes, but our mortal bodies too are but a joke. And if after Death came a capering Clown, tongue stuck out? The sage would laugh, because he knows even death to be a joke. Would the mathematician — who intuits that the *reductio ad absurdum* is 'really' a *reductio ad infinitum* of an elusive sublimity — join in the chuckle? Perhaps. But then, mathematicians aren't a humorous lot. Or are they?



## Surfing the Ocean Of Soul Music

By Bindu Chawla



Y father, Pandit Amarnath, would often tell us this story: His guru, Ustad Amir Khan Saheb, was an adolescent when a famous musician visited their home. Mid-conversation, the visitor said to his father, Ustad Shahmir Khan Saheb: "I have 'crossed' the ocean of music!" To this, Amir retorted: "You may have crossed the ocean of music, but have you surfed enough to know at which spot how much water flows?"

No *nada-yogi* has, to this day, been able to say that he has 'completed' his *sadhana* in music. *Sadhana* can complete us, but is in itself beyond completion. Through *sadhana*, *siddhi* and *samadhi*, we merge into the ocean of music, but we never 'cross' it. Even as a child, Ustad Amir Khan Saheb seemed to have an inner knowledge of such matters. A deeply contemplative boy, he was ever absorbed in the ocean of *nada* (sound), its highs and lows, aware of the cosmic play of *swaras*. He went on to found the Indore *gharana* (school) of Hindustani classical music, creating a singing style that became a *gayaki* of the *anahada nada* — the unheard sound. To tell us the inner and outer secrets of his style, Pandit Amarnath would repeatedly draw our attention to the use of *mauna* or silence in the singing of his ustad. A deeply creative silence founted each phrase of his music.

How was one to 'listen' to this silence? Through the *tanpura* (string instrument). The *tanpura* was a symbol of the *anahada*. Singing a phrase, then allowing the *tanpura* to take over and 'dictate' the next phrase — that was the technique. This interim silence provoked and stimulated more and more new phrases. Thus Khan Saheb 'fashioned' the 'silent phrase' in his singing, which Pandit Amarnath would refer to as the thinking or working out of the pause, or the *nyas*, in the entire phraseology of the *alap* or slow improvisation of his *gayaki*. When in the name of music silence finds an antonym, it is referred to as sound. But when in the name of music silence finds its synonym, that is referred to as *nada yoga*, the yoga of music or sound.

One night after dinner, guru and *shishya* (student) were taking a walk. Khan Saheb had his right arm around the shoulder of the young man, of whom he was both proud and fond. They were walking slowly. Normally, Khan Saheb's silence would speak and communicate everything to the initiated, and there would often



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be no need for a verbal dialogue. But today his silence, directed towards his shishya, expressed that he wished to say something. Soon he stopped, and said: "My son, every night at bedtime, hum the raga which is circling in your mind, before you sleep. If there is any doubt in your mind, keep thinking about it till you fall asleep. In the morning it shall have been resolved..." Were the answers lying buried in one's soul?

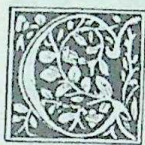
I recall a *khayal bandish* created in the *raga Bahaduri Todi* by Pandit Amarnath: *Pratham bhor jage, jage chatur sujan, Antaryami lekha baanche, suniyo hukam subhan*. "At first dawn awakes, awakes the wise man, His inner self taking karmic accounts, O listen to the glory of the Divine Word!"

All night we speak to God. And when we have been heard, in the morning God begins to speak to us, through us... This is the inner process that was at work when Ustad Amir Khan Saheb sang. He appeared so deeply absorbed in his tanpura. But the way his music was being 'heard' and being 'answered' it was as if the 'Oversoul' had chosen to sing through him. That is why the Indore style is also known as a meditative style — which suffuses itself with the glamour of the spirit, referred to as *khumar* or intoxication. And that is why Ustad Amir Khan Saheb's music unfailingly intoxicates listeners even today.



# Protect the Fabric Of Daily Life

By Daisaku Ikeda



CITIZENS everywhere today are demanding that their leaders make choices to advance the cause of peace. What is disturbing is the grotesque imbalance between our powers of destruction and our failing ethical capacity for empathy and self-restraint.

However, I firmly believe that we possess immense, untapped resources that can help establish a creative, dynamic harmony that is peaceful. The key to this is a new ethic of co-existence, one that encourages appreciation of our interconnection, the awareness that what impacts any one member of the human family impacts us all. This in turn requires that we refocus on individual human beings, that we establish a 'life-sized' approach.

When we are presented with the realities of other people's lives, feelings of connection and empathy naturally arise. This is why war and violence always start with efforts to dehumanise the 'enemy'. This is why the media in any country will portray 'our' suffering in detail, while minimising or ignoring the misery inflicted on the anonymous mass that is 'them'.

Imagine you are travelling to enemy lands, and follow in your mind the lives of those on the other side of the TV screen. You will find that people there are no different from you. Like you, me and most others, they too seek the ordinary joys of fellowship and love, celebrate the vibrant growth of children, pray that their parents may enjoy security and health. This is reality, the fabric of ordinary life. Post-war, buildings may be rebuilt, but the wounds and scars of violence never really heal.

Genuine leadership must be based on a solid commitment to protecting the precious fabric of daily life. The ordinary citizens of the world are raising their voice, insisting that all decisions — whether political, military or economic — be made with this human reality firmly in view. The common cause of human happiness is the strongest basis for human solidarity. In a world of intimate interconnection, solidarity cannot be limited to just one group or nation. It must embrace all the people everywhere.

This is not empty idealism. The very real differences of culture and worldview need not separate us in some insurmountable way. A 'life-sized' approach is also cosmic in its outlook. When we truly focus on individual human beings, we can see each person as manifesting a unique aspect of a universe



of human possibility — and doing so in an invaluable and irreplaceable manner.

Peace will not come from passive waiting. It must be worked for with energy and focus. Dialogue is an important way to enable peace initiatives achieve their goal. Dialogue and communication — whatever the immediate outcome — is in itself an act of faith in humanity. We must ceaselessly work to strengthen and confirm such a faith. The struggle to understand and be understood requires that each of us return to the deepest source of our humanity, despite differences of history, culture or creed. For, it is there and in the quiet aspirations of daily life that we will find answers to the daunting challenges that face us.



# Double Celebration: Sankara & Ramanuja

By Pranav Khullar



DI Sankaracharya and Ramanujacharya were great philosophers. Their road maps to the Absolute reflect the essence of Indian spiritual thought and tradition, although they held divergent views — while Sankara advocated monism or *advaita*, Ramanuja believed in *vishishtadvaita*, that contains elements of both *advaita* and *dvaita* philosophy.

Sankara's *advaita* is best summed up in the following verse: *Brahma satyam jagan mithya jiva brahmaivahnaparah* — "Brahma alone is real; the world is illusory and the individual and universal soul are one". Ramanuja's *vishishtadvaita* focuses on the relation between the world and God.

The *bhasyas* of Sankara and Ramanuja were essentially treatises on the *Brahma sutras* of Vyasa — 555 sutras, aphorisms containing the quintessence of Upanishadic thought. Their deliberations, like most of Vedantic philosophy, are triggered by the great call of the first sutra itself: "*Atha to Brahma jignasa*" — "now therefore the enquiry into Brahma", a call to free enquiry which sets the tone for all speculation. Ironically, both based their deliberations on the same text and started out with similar assumptions but they branched out in different directions, Sankara upholding an uncompromising monistic view and Ramanuja posing a theistic view of the Vedas.

Sankara's appeal lay as much in his erudition and dialectical skill as in his being a child prodigy. He lived for barely 30 years; yet he set ablaze the intellectual world of his times, redefining, revamping and revitalising old concepts not only with great strength but humility too. From the backwaters of Kaladi in Kerala to the northern Gangetic plains he took on all, scholars, sages and savants, engaging them in debates of the Yajnavalkya-Maitreyi kind. Equally, he was a rebel with a social cause — he insisted on performing the last rites of his mother despite being a sanyasi and that too in the backyard of his ancestral house. He authored simple but profound hymns like the *Bhaja Govindam* and *Saundaryalahari* which appealed to a large cross-section of people. Sankara believed his mission was cosmic.

Ramanuja, who lived to be more than 100 years, was deeply involved in the theological tradition. Inspired by the 12 Alvar poet-saints of South India and Vaishnavite theology, he identified the Absolute with God and differed fundamentally



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 with the advaitic position of Sankara.

It is said that Ramanuja was inspired to write his commentary on the Brahma sutras at the time of the death of his guru when his attention was drawn towards the three folded fingers of the right hand of his guru which signified his three unfulfilled desires, one of which was to write an authoritative commentary on the Brahma sutras. Ramanuja wrote his *magnum opus*, the *Sribhashya*, in response to his guru's command.

Sankara had a two-level theory of Brahma, perceiving it as *nirguna*, without attributes, but manifesting itself with personal attributes, *saguna*. Nirguna being ultimately true and saguna false, Ramanuja contended that saguna and nirguna are one, related as body and soul. The Brahma-world relation in Sankara is explained in the snake and rope analogy where the illusion is caused by mistaking a rope for a snake.

Both Sankara and Ramanuja were seminal thinkers; they were also great apostles of bhakti. Herein lay their mass appeal. Sankara's devotional outpourings were meant to inspire and arouse people to their innate divine self while Ramanuja was already a torch-bearer of the Vaishnava tradition.



# Surya the Healer And Energiser

By Tehmina Gae



URYAYOG is a dynamic spiritual yoga which brings us in tune with nature and the inner self. We are drawn towards eternal light, from *saguna swaroop* to *nirguna swaroop* — from the human to the Supreme.

Surya, the powerhouse of our solar system is the benevolent *Nishkamkarmi* — the infallible healer, the powerful energiser, the supreme teacher — who leads us towards *Ekam Sat*, the only One. Suryayog is a meaningful way of life taught by Himalayan masters and practised by yogis who survive without food and sustenance for days. They draw power from Surya whose vibrant energy transforms and changes the bio-electric powers in all beings, fusing body, prana, mind and soul into a divine experience of cosmic consciousness. It is a unique amalgamation of *yoga*, *nada*, *rishi*, *reiki*, and deep silence. It is a nine-fold path, a pure benediction from nature. Preferably at dawn, the energy of Surya is invoked through a series of simple yogic postures, aura purification, deep breathing, chanting, unlocking of energy centres and above all, an unconditional surrender to nature, our ultimate guru.

Acharya Jowelji who practises Suryayog carries the message of Mahavtaar Babaji, the yogic-Christ who many believe resides in the Himalayas for thousands of years. Jowelji believes that to love all is an expression of the divine One and his sacred mission is to uplift society to the higher realm of knowledge to help remove physical, mental and spiritual blocks. He believes that the constant practice of Suryayog can cure us of several chronic diseases like blood pressure, heart ailments, depression and phobias. The Acharya says: "Don't control the mind; be friendly with it. Come back to nature, she will lift you like a child to the highest realms of meditation, to the Buddha-mind stage where the dualistic cosmic delusion of *maya* is conquered."

Suryayog practitioners experience inner peace, boundless joy and energy. "Their *bhagic* structure is transformed to a yogic one", with little need for food and sleep. They acquire the grace and courage to face problems with equanimity. Suryayog is above all religious dogmas and is a divine symphony of universal harmony, peace and brotherhood. Acharya Jowel says: "Surya controls the seasons and the passage of day and night. He is the source of all life. He casts his rays upon all without discrimination. He is our protector".



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Sun worship is not new to India. The *Gayatri Mantra* is a fervent salutation to the sun and the *Surya Namaskar* is an ideal morning exercise. Acharya Satyanand, in *Surya Chikatsa*, talks about colour therapy. He divides the use of colours into three groups, each with a principal colour: Orange, green and indigo.

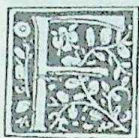
Orange imparts heat and can cure colds and phlegmatic illnesses, removing the torpidity of the liver and other digestive organs. Green is cool, it helps fortify the muscles and strengthens the brain. It helps remove rheumatism and related disorders. Blue or indigo is cool, too, and can eliminate diseases caused by excessive bile or *pitta*, as well as a host of other diseases.

Says Acharya Jowel: "Through Suryayog, your mind naturally begins to concentrate, which is the aim of all spiritual processes. The sun's rays collide with our thoughts and create silence. The mind is too powerful to be managed by ordinary human consciousness. The photons from the solar system help to control the mind."



## Symbiotic Mysticism In Devotional Poems

By A N D Haksar



EW have heard of the mystic poems *Brahma Prakash* or *Dasa Avatar* by the mediaeval Muslim saint Pir Shams. Both are famous *ginans* of South Asia's Ismaili community, sometimes also known as *Khojas* or *Aga Khanis* in popular parlance.

Ginans are hymn-like poems of spiritual import. They are revered by the faithful in deep veneration as repositories of wisdom and spiritual knowledge, and as transmitting the essential teachings of the Holy *Qur'an* in the vernacular. Composed in Sindhi, Gujarati, Hindustani and Punjabi among other subcontinental languages, the oldest are ascribed to the *pirs* or saints who first preached Ismaili Islam in India nearly 1,000 years ago.

The tradition continued, and recent composers include the Karachi saint, Sayyida Imam Begum, in the 19th century. "Ginans are recited daily", writes Ismaili scholar Ali Asni, "whenever members congregate for ritual prayers." The recitation is itself a ritual on special occasions like birthdays of the Prophet and the Imam, and on the new year, *Navroz*.

Outside the context of formal worship, ginans are sung as auspicious blessings and quoted as proverbs. They feature in concerts and cassette recordings.

The contents of ginans are varied. Some are supplications for grace and enlightenment, like *Ruhani Visal* or spiritual union by Pir Hasan Kabiruddin. Others, like *Moman Chetamani* or warning to the faithful by Pir Sadruddin, impart ethical and moral instruction. Yet others deal with cosmological themes or the mystic life, like *Brahma Gayatri* and *Boojh Niranjani* by the same saint. Devotion and piety is a common theme. One feature of ginans is of wider interest for plural societies. It is the Ismaili *pirs'* interpretation of Islamic concepts and ideas that could relate to indigenous religious and cultural contexts. Not only were the hymns composed in local languages, they also utilised the poetic forms and musical modes of local tradition. At the level of religious ideas, there is record of ginans sung to Sikh and Hindu gatherings in East Africa.

The acculturation with the larger Indian environment is reflected also in the name *Satpanth* by which the Ismaili tradition came to be known. "The *pir*," says Asni, "introduced his teachings as a natural culmination of local belief systems."



One ginan cites the mythological king Harishchandra as a model of righteousness. Another is titled *Darshan diyo mere nath*, a popular sentiment.

In *Dasa Avatar*, as noted by Islamic historian Annemarie Schimmel, "Muslim and Hindu traditions seem to merge as the poet represents Ismaili Islam as fulfilment of Hindu religious tradition". In such mythopoesis, the tenth avatara of Vishnu is renamed *Nakalanki* (stainless), and is identified with Ali, the first Shia Imam.

Such an assimilationist approach sees no contradiction between people's religious identity and their participation in indigenous culture. It is natural that it should be opposed by those who tend towards exclusivism. Ginans were termed by some orthodox commentators as lacking an Islamic personality.

Elements which constitute culture are being viewed increasingly from a purely religious perspective in parts of South Asia today. The adoption of Arabic and Persian cultural elements and more is considered by some as an essential aspect of Islamisation. Then there is the process of Sanskritisation, now reformulated as Hindutva. Both result in greater cultural distancing between the two communities, to the detriment of both.

The word ginan is similar to *jnana*, which means wisdom. This goal is by no means exclusive to any creed or culture. The hymns manifest a cultural synthesis for a devotional purpose. Their symbolism stretches across religious barriers towards a higher harmony.



# Leave Behind Those Psychological Shoes

By Swami Sukhabodhananda



OME of us 'think', many of us think we think, and most of us never think of thinking. Very few use the grand prerogative of the mind, many never think but think they do. Very few of us really think, because in order to think, we should have the freedom to think.

We touch the earth with our physical foot, we touch life with the psychological foot. That is why in temples, we leave our slippers outside — we leave certain coverings that covered our feet and enter the temple barefoot — in the nakedness, you discover truth. Shoes cover our feet and thereby we don't deeply connect to Mother Earth. Entering the temple is entering into the space of God. Our psychological foot, too, is covered by psychological shoes, which is our conditioning, our dogmas, our opinions and our beliefs. With the psychological shoes on, we never touch life.

Very few of us can really look at a flower as it is: "Are we free to see this flower?" Definitely not. Because, when somebody looks at a flower, he looks at it with his psychology of likes and dislikes, of should or should not, of must or must not. Therefore, very few of us really look at the flower; rather, we look at our opinion of the flower — our likes and dislikes of the flower.

Therefore, we never see it as it is. So removing the shoe means removing the psychological shoes of our conditioning, our opinion, dogmas. When you leave these and innocently look at life, in that innocence you see that something very different happens. If you analyse it, you will see that if we are unhappy in life it is not because of what is, it is because of our opinion of how life should be. When our opinion of life is in conflict with our life, this conflict makes us unhappy. The deepest need in you is to be happy, and your conflict with life creates unhappiness. This unhappiness is like a toxin, a disturbance in your energy field. You look at situations, which you feel should not be; and you get angry. When you get angry, look at your anger. It is often directed at a scapegoat, not the real cause of your unhappiness.

Most of our anger is not in proportion to the situation. Why is it not in proportion to the situation? Think and inquire. There is bottled up unhappiness in you, which is waiting for an excuse to emote and eject. So the external situation becomes a scapegoat. For example, a child breaks a glass, the father gets angry, takes a stick and hits the child. Now it is not for breaking



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the glass that the father is annoyed with the child. He might have had some tension in the office that led to his unhappiness and the situation at home was just a reasonable excuse and an outlet for giving vent to his emotions. The moment he hits the child, the child becomes unconscious, then the wife, the mother of the child, becomes annoyed. The whole house is reduced to chaos. Chaos makes you wonder whether life is worth living.

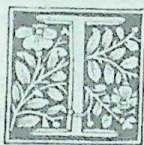
Many people become frustrated and come to lose interest in life. Some are even driven to committing suicide. They have not touched life with their psychological foot, they only touched life with psychological shoes. In that same situation, with a different attitude one could see the innocence in the child, teach the child to learn from the experience and handle things with care. Then the world would no more be chaos, but a well-ordered cosmos.

When you remove the psychological shoes (of your likes/dislikes, should/should not, must/must not), and then touch life with innocence, in the innocence you will find that even in disorder there is an order, which an ordinary, impure mind cannot see. We owe this great responsibility to ourselves of attaining purity and clarity of vision in looking at life, and this is the symbolic meaning of leaving your shoes before you enter a temple.



# Religion is a Bond Between Man & Nature

By Mata Amritanandamayi



T is religion that helps a person to maintain the awareness that he or she is not separate from nature. Without religion mankind loses that awareness. Religion teaches us to love nature. In truth, the progress and prosperity of mankind depends solely on the good which man does for nature. Religion helps to maintain a harmonious relationship between human beings, between the individual and society, and between man and nature.

The relation between man and nature is like the relationship between *Pindanda* (the microcosm) and *Brahmanda* (the macrocosm). Our great ancestors understood this. That is why they gave so much importance to nature worship in religious practices. The idea behind all religious *acharam* (practices) was to closely associate human beings with nature. By establishing a loving relationship between man and nature, they ensured both the balance of nature and the progress of the human race.

Look at a tree. It gives shade even to a person who cuts it down. It gives its sweet, delicious fruits to the person who harms it. But our attitude is completely different. When we plant a tree, or raise an animal, we are only concerned about the profit we will make from it. If the animal ceases to make a profit, we will have it destroyed without a thought. As soon as the cow stops producing milk, we will sell it to the butcher in order to make money. If a tree stops yielding fruit, we will cut it down and make furniture or something else from it.

Selfishness reigns supreme. Selfless love cannot be found anywhere. But our ancestors were not like this. They knew that trees, plants and animals were absolutely necessary for the benefit and good of humans.

They foresaw that man in his selfish moments would forget nature and cease to have any concern for her. They also knew that future generations would suffer, due to man's disassociation from nature. They therefore linked each religious rite with nature. Thus, through religious principles, they could succeed in developing an emotional bond between man and nature.

The ancients loved and worshipped trees and plants — the *Banyan* and *Bilva* trees, and the *Tulsi* plant — not because the trees bore fruits and helped them to make a profit, but because the ancients knew that they themselves in truth



were one with all of nature.

More than the knowledge of modern science it is the deeper understanding that religion provides of the truth of the oneness of all creation, which teaches humans to love nature and to develop a sense of reverence and devotion to all. The love that religion teaches is not the kind of love which a gross intellect can understand. It is that of the heart. It can only be imbibed by a person who is endowed with a subtle intellect born of faith.

Everything is pervaded by consciousness. It is consciousness that sustains the world and all the creatures in it. To worship everything, seeing God in all, is what religion advises. Such an attitude teaches us to love nature. None of us would consciously injure our body because we know it would be painful.

Similarly, we will feel the pain of other people to be our own when the realisation dawns within us that everything is pervaded by one and the same consciousness. Compassion will arise and we will sincerely wish to help and protect all. In that state we won't feel like plucking even a leaf unnecessarily. We will pick a flower only on the last day of its existence, before it falls from the stem. We will consider it as harmful to the plant and to nature if the flower is plucked on its very first day due to our greed.

Whatever is provided by Nature, the source of flowers and plants, should be lovingly returned to it. This is the symbolism behind the offerings of flowers to God. It also helps to enhance our devotion to God. Worship performed with one-pointedness helps to diminish thoughts and this in turn will cleanse and purify the mind.

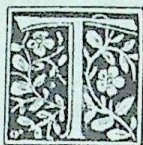
Looking at nature and observing its selfless way of giving we can become aware of our own limitations. This will help us to develop devotion and self-surrender to God.

Thus nature helps us to become closer to God and teaches us to truly worship Him. In reality nature is nothing but God's visible form which we can behold and experience through our senses. Indeed by loving and serving nature we are worshipping God Himself. Just as nature creates favourable circumstances for a coconut to become a coconut tree and for a seed to transform itself into a huge fruit, it creates the necessary circumstances through which the individual soul can reach the Supreme Being and merge in eternal union with Him.



# Purusa and Prakriti Are Inseparable

By S S Hans



THE world comprises two principles, life and matter. *Purusa* or God represents life and *prakriti* or nature represents matter. According to Sri Aurobindo, the poet-seer, "Life is a movement of the Eternal in Time". *Purusa* is the seer and the *prakriti*, the object of sight.

The *Bhagavad Gita* declares *prakriti* to be responsible for bringing into existence creation and its instruments. The five elements earth, water, fire, air and ether and their five attributes touch, taste, sight, smell and sound constitute creation while the five organs of perception or *gyan indriyas*, the five organs of action called *karm indriyas* plus the mind, the faculty of discrimination and ego — these 13 constitute the instruments.

*Prakriti* is not a part of *purusa*. She is his *Shakti* or energy and is not different from *shaktiman* or energiser. At the time of the final dissolution of creation, the whole of this objective world gets dissolved into *prakriti*. This *prakriti* alone remains and the objective world disappears. In other words, she manifests herself in the form of this objective world and when she is inactive, she remains in her unmanifest state. From *prakriti* evolves in turn the principles of cosmic intelligence, cosmic ego and cosmic mind, being in fact the three different phases of the same principle, the mind.

According to Sri Aurobindo, "Nature laboured for innumerable million of years to create a material universe of flaming suns and systems. She stooped to make this earth a habitable planet. For all that incalculable time, she was or seemed busy only with the evolution of matter."

Speech, mind and intellect cannot describe or understand *prakriti* because all these are her evolute and that is why she is called indefinable and incomprehensible. Since the cause always pervades its effects, *prakriti* pervades all the objective world and its elements. But the *purusa*, being very subtle, His pervasiveness is even greater than that of *prakriti*. So the great cause of all *purusa* which signifies God, or the principle of consciousness pervades, both the *prakriti* and its evolute, the objective world and its elements. *Prakriti* carries on the process of creation with *purusa* as her lord and master under His supervision. The virtual creator is thus the *purusa* Himself. *Prakriti* is only His agent.

There are two varieties of *purusa* — the *jivatma* which is the



individual soul and *paramatma* or God.

The paramatma has again two aspects — *saguna* with attributes like *sattava* that represents goodness, *rajas* which stands for action while *tamas* represents inertia and *nirguna* or 'without attributes' that stands for the absolute. In other words, God is pure consciousness but He is personal and impersonal. In jnana or knowledge we see God as impersonal and in bhakti or devotion we see God as personal.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Shakti stands for the personal aspect of the impersonal". Both personal and impersonal are the two aspects of the same reality, the integral Brahma or the Supreme Purusa. It is fundamentally the static and dynamic aspects of the same reality which are complementary and remain inseparably together. The static aspect represents the timeless, spaceless and causeless substratum as the Brahma or the Unmanifest Absolute whereas the dynamic One is represented by the infinite caution, creation or flow of energy.

The wonderful phenomenon about reality is that apparently contradictory but factually complementary aspects are so absolutely inseparable that the one is inconceivable without the other. Thus reality is defined as something mysterious wherein the seeming contradictions are harmoniously blended and wherein the being and becoming, consciousness and matter, subject and object, Brahman and maya, unmanifest and manifest, absolute and relative, impersonal and personal, purusa and prakriti, all different expressions of the same reality, are held together in one embrace.

It may be summed up in a classic statement by Sri Aurobindo, "All life here is a stage in an unfolding progressive evolution of a spirit that has involved itself in matter and is labouring to manifest itself in that reluctant substance. This is the whole secret of earthly existence."



# Get Empowered with Shakti and Shanti

By Indu Jain



ARAMESHWARI, Jagadeeshwari, Jagadamba, Vishwavilasini, Vishalakshi, Mahamaya — we invoke the powers of all these female deities in the temple or as moortis and posters but we rarely care to acknowledge the potential of women in real life.

The exceptions are notable. Bengal is unique in this respect. There is this story about a Bengali daughter-in-law who became angry. The family immediately began worshipping her saying Ma Kali had manifested in her. Kali is worshipped in many forms, portraying different aspects like *shanti*, *kranti* and *bhakti*. The portrayal of Shakti as a fearsome goddess has always attracted popular attention.

It's a pity that we worship womanpower in the form of deities, but fail to recognise this power in real life. In every woman, there is great vital power or Shakti. In some it is active, in many it is dormant. It is in the interest of all of us to recognise this latent power regardless of our gender — and acknowledge it as a force that can work wonders even in our day-to-day lives. By tweaking this dormant energy, women can play a greater role in shaping our collective future that upholds peace and harmony rather than aggression and violence. This is because woman is by nature peace-loving. Woman can counsel man that the word 'war' actually means "woman absolutely removed".

It is often said in jest that "behind every successful man, there is a woman". It is indeed true that man's empowerment lies hidden in the empowerment of woman. It's the kinetic energy that has to be invoked, not static energy. Streeshakti is present in all that surrounds us. Whenever you ask people what they see around them, their answers are always in a limited realm. They mention objects, the physical things around us. But they do not see the unlimited space around us, the space that is actually the source of all potential power. Once we connect with this space, we reach the realm of cosmic power.

The secret of success is to move from the finite level, from that of the body, to the less limited level of the mind and from there, go to higher consciousness or pure awareness. Every human being is the seat of God. Every human being has the capacity to evolve from the physical to the mental and then go on to the spiritual with some faith, effort and perseverance.

By internalising *Streeshakti*, we can replace hate with the forces of knowledge and vitality. Disaster is inevitable



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whenever any endeavour is wholly man-centric. For any endeavour to succeed fully, it is imperative to harmonise the knowledge of man and woman. This is clearly evident from the depiction of the Divine as the *Ardhanareeswara* — half-man, half-woman or Shiv-Shakti. When the two sexes join forces on equal terms, the energy so produced will be positive.

In the world of business, today's corporates are beginning to recognise that closing the gender gap is not only the 'right' or politically correct thing to do, it also makes good business sense. In maintaining a male-female balance, the creative energies of women are brought to the workforce. Women are multi-task experts. They can perform many roles simultaneously and effectively. From humble homemaker to those in powerful political and economic positions, women can accomplish many tasks at the same time and with a cool temperament.

A woman is personified as both Shanti and Shakti. Although these are perceived as diametrically opposite aspects, they actually complement one another. Power is not only the power to destroy, but also the power to create and nurture peace. As embodiments of both these qualities, women are the spiritual lifelines of society. This is why women are, normally, never the instigators of war. Women can play a very important role in bringing about world peace. This could be the reason why the word 'peace' is itself a feminine noun in many Indo-European languages like Sanskrit, French, Italian and Spanish.

There is an interesting story about a male chauvinist bigot who almost died. He was revived and brought back to life. His friends gathered around him. "Tell us", they said. "What did you see? Did you see His Divine Being?" "Yes," he answered. "You will find this difficult to accept, the Divine Being is actually a She".

Remember, only Shakti moves Shiva. Therefore, without shakti, you will be 'shav' or lifeless. Real empowerment will come when we worship and honour the same shakti of the gods in the women around us. Let shakti no longer lie dormant, let it arise and let us allow it to flower and empower every one of us.



# Spirit of Dialogue Must for Peace

By Daisaku Ikeda



profound sense of disillusionment makes many people question whether the 20th century was really a period of advancement. While the remarkable progress in science and technology brought with it many blessings, the ceaseless occurrence of war and the unprecedented horrors of the age have cast an indelible shadow over any perceived achievements.

When I reflect upon these issues, I am reminded of my discussions with Linus Pauling, with whom I shared a long-standing belief that we must make the 21st century a 'century of life'. Extending his support to this concept, Pauling defined the current century as one, "In which greater attention will be paid to human beings and to their happiness and health".

A careful examination of the list of the century's advances will reveal that these were primarily material and physical. Humanity's spiritual life seems to have followed a one-way path of shrinkage and atrophy, becoming trapped in what Buddhism refers to as the 'lesser self' — a state of isolation that results when the ties among people and between people, and the cosmos are severed.

How can this historical trend be reversed to bring about a true century of life? This was the historical and civilisational challenge that Pauling and I together felt compelled to address. Two of the specific indices that come to mind are creative coexistence and the autonomous functioning of the inner will. Both of these are extremely close in meaning to the key words 'life' and 'dependent origination'.

At the same time, both have been conspicuously absent from the spiritual life of the 20th century. All ideologies share the inherent fault, that they establish barriers of discrimination based on perceived differences. These are then treated as fixed and unchanging; one's own superior standing is asserted, justifying the marginalisation and oppression of others.

I think we must recognise that the present movement towards globalisation contains within it the danger of becoming yet another ideological battle. Specifically, I am concerned that the inflexible application of so-called 'global standards' can cause the logic of conflict, exclusion and pressure to be brought to bear on those societies and parts of the world, that do not follow a particular model of development. More than enough warning signs have already emerged to temper the enthusiasm of the



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most dedicated proponents of globalisation.

By this, I mean the shocking disparity of wealth between and within societies as well as the purely speculative, non-productive global movements of money that are sometimes referred to as 'casino capitalism'.

I believe that we must carefully attend to the dearly-bought lessons of ideological domination. We must replace unrestrained competition with an ethos of coexistence, the application of external pressure and force with the autonomous decisions of people and societies. I believe, we must uphold these new values as we advance steadily towards our long-term goal of making the 21st century truly a century of life.

The Buddhist teaching of dependent origination, which places ultimate emphasis on interrelatedness and interdependence, is essentially synonymous with creative coexistence. Further, in Buddhism, the workings of life — the realm of genuine reality reached, when we see past the false trappings of language and the tendency to see things as fixed, unchanging entities — are described as 'the moment-to-moment spontaneous issuing forth'. Indeed, this phrase describes the essentially inner-motivated, autonomous nature of the vital force of life.

Dialogue has the power to restore and revitalise our shared humanity by setting free our innate capacity for good. It is an indispensable lodestone around which people are united and trust is fostered. It was the failure to make dialogue the foundation of human society that unleashed the bitter tragedies of the 20th century.

The year 2001 was designated as the 'Year of Dialogue among Civilisations'. We must spread the spirit of dialogue to make it the current and flow of the 21st century — a century of life. In this way, we can together create an era in which all people enjoy the fruits of peace and happiness, and celebrate their limitless dignity and potential. If these values can be made into the driving spirit of the age, we will be able to put behind us the nightmares of the 20th century, and realise a century of life and of peace, a peace that is much more than a mere interlude between wars.

The author is president of Soka Gakkai International, an organisation working towards worldwide peace



# The Rang and Fraa Of Human Life

By L Khimhunji



ANGFRAA, a unique school of thought, has two aspects, *Rang* which is objective and *Fraa*, which is subjective. The unseen supernatural power or the unifying kingdom of plants, animals and human beings constitute its objective aspect, *Rang*, while the kindness, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, wisdom and virtue comprise its subjective aspect, *Fraa*.

*Rang* is formless; *Fraa* is the same reality conceived in human form. *Rangfraa* is neither *Rang* nor *Fraa*; it is the ultimate reality underlying them, just as the soul is neither the body nor the mind but the underlying reality without which neither mind nor body can exist.

In nature, everything, living or non-living, irrespective of its will, is caught in the cycle of life which has three phases: the phase of creation being regulated by the principle of creation or the law of manifestation, the phase of sustenance being controlled by the principle of sustenance, and the phase of dissolution being operated by the principle of dissolution. Nothing in this universe can escape this cycle of life.

According to *Rangfraaism*, the purpose of religion is to uphold the true nature of man which in fact is as pure and holy as the cosmic nature. To unfold one's true nature, in the real sense, is to synchronise one's nature with one's external cosmic nature, which is basically amoral in character. A perfect harmony between the nature within and the nature without can be achieved only when the three levels of morality are transcended altogether so as to become amoral again, but it is the physical self that stands in the way of synchronisation. The physical self is the source of lust, greed and ego under which our real nature is buried. To reveal this true self means to succeed in synchronising it with one's external cosmic nature. The non-synchronisation or maladjustment between these two natures is the source of suffering and pain.

*Rangfraaism* is universal in character; it is an open system. Hence any person can join in this act of bringing humanity closer to God, leaving aside all differences. *Rangfraaism* only seeks what is good, for it is concerned with human beings. Sects, creeds and religion are man-made. They are not the absolute truth. So long as we recognise ourselves as Hindu, Muslim or Christian, we are not truly religious. To become truly religious, one has to transcend these practical 'truths' or barriers. To



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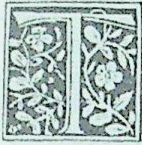
realise the ultimate truth is the aim of every religion. Religion, according to Rangfraaism, is an art of living sanely, with a sense of sacrifice and service to humanity.

God is infinite, while man is finite, so there remains always a gap between God and man — the eternal gapping — according to Rangfraaism. The main object of every religion, according to Rangfraaism, is to reduce this gap at least with respect to the subjective aspect of perfection. The less the gap the better it is for the individual and for humanity. This gap in the phenomenal world is manifested as the law of natural deficit. In nature, everything tends to stability but by virtue of its own inherent property, the stability can be achieved only at the cost of instability somewhere else. Hence it is an eternal process. This process must undergo the three phases of life in an endless cyclic manner. This eternal gap is manifested in the physical world as the difference of potentialities. It is the gap between the fulfilled and the unfulfilled, perfection and imperfection, the known and the unknown. The process of thesis and antithesis goes on in nature by virtue of its own inherent property.



# Unleash Your Energy: Run with the Wolves

By Swati Chopra



ODAY is International Women's Day. Around the world, in conferences and debates, ways to 'improve' women's lot and empower them will be discussed. They will remain a view from the outside unless we find a way to tune in to the spirit of the eternal feminine, and rediscover the creatrix that lies reduced to a vestigial place in our psyche after centuries of neglect. Today would be a good day to begin a renewal of this ancient relationship with our innate, instinctual, feminine Self.

Why do I talk of the 'eternal feminine'? Aren't all women 'in touch' with it just by virtue of being women? As inextricable as the biology of womanhood, the blood and babies, the bread and bones, is with the experience of the feminine, it came to acquire an intuitive, creative aspect as well. Rooted in the physical process of fertility and birthing, the feminine — woman, earth, goddess — were revered as the very matrix of creation.

Even today, in spite of Her spirit being driven back and built over, the primeval creatrix dwells in our being. We glimpse Her in moments of inspiration. She is implicit in the natural cycles of our lives, when we give birth and rear our young. More than a function of gender, She is the stirring towards unfettered, uninhibited expression that all of us feel but few listen to.

In her book *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, Clarissa Pinkola Estes explores this as the 'wild woman' archetype. She sees a direct parallel between the subjugating of the inner wild woman with environmental destruction. "Like wildlife and wild lands, the spiritual lands of Wild Woman have been plundered or burnt, dens bulldozed and natural cycles forced into unnatural rhythms to please others."

When women surrender their creative lives, allow their spirit to be brutalised, their sexuality suppressed, they suffer from a deadening of the soul that makes it difficult for them to function joyfully. Their intuition dulls, and they no longer "run with the wolves". The foisting of regressive cultural stereotyping that denies women the freedom to be themselves weighs down their spirit. One way they can reconnect with their feminine spirit is in the form of the Divine Feminine — by identifying the limited self with the Primeval Mother.

This is available to us in the way of *Aghora*, the radical spiritual discipline of Tantra. For the Aghori, the practitioner of Aghora, the cosmos is feminine — *Adya* or *Adishakti* — the



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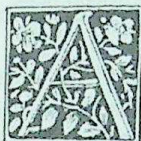
original Shakti (energy) that everything manifest and unmanifest is part of. To realise Adya, the Aghori begins by activating her *Kundalini Shakti*. Each practitioner must relate with the goddess personally as mother, lover, or friend. The ultimate aim is to establish Her within. It is a journey from the limited self to the infinite, eternal Feminine.

Even though mother goddesses abounded in Hinduism, Aghora never became part of mainstream Indian spirituality, and its radical influences have been either sanitised or expunged altogether. Its myths, however, continue to exist in our cultural domain to point the way back to the terrible yet gentle power of the Feminine. As Aghori Vimalananda says in Robert Svoboda's *Aghora*: "She is really you. You are a minuscule part of Her, and you must love yourself to make progress." Acting from this awareness can only enrich our interaction with ourselves and the creative wild woman within.



# In Praise of Trees: Nature's Gift

By Aruna Jethwani



tree is a beautiful expression of mother earth's creativity. It has shakti. It restores balance in the environment by its positive force. A tree doesn't have a mind of its own, only the cosmic heart of the universe. It responds to human sentiments.

The *pipal* tree is sacred to Hindus and Buddhists. The Buddha attained nirvana under this tree. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna said: "I am as strong as the pipal is among trees."

Pipal and *tulsi* play significant roles in Hindu rituals. The neem tree is the favourite of Durga, and it is grown to ward off evil spirits. The *Avdhumra* tree is believed to be the abode of Lord Dattatreya, so it is never cut down.

An Indonesian friend informs me that such belief prevails in her country too — the tree is said to have supernatural powers. If this tree has to be cut a special ceremony is performed to propitiate the gods. The sandalwood tree is sacred to all religions because of its special properties.

Tree worship evolved as a ritual to preserve the sensitive eco-system. Once a gentleman narrated a touching story: "I had a large farm with more than a hundred trees. Every morning, I used to go around the farm, starting from a particular tree and return to it by noon. For some reason I had to sell off the farm. I loved the trees. I had tended them.

On my last day, I went round the farm as usual, but I was feeling low. After I completed my round, I stood under the tree from where I started. It was a windless day. Not a leaf moved. I bid farewell to the farm and to that particular tree. Its leaves trembled. The tree shook visibly. It had moved an inch in an effort to reach out to me. The leaves were moist. The tree had cried just as much as I had cried."

Trees have soothing qualities and medicinal properties. Like some animals, they have a sense of empathy, too.

Today, electronic devices can measure the energy or vibrations released by a tree. The Upanishads narrate the story of how Yajñvalkyi compared a tree and a human being while discussing Creation with Gargi: "As a tree of the forest,/ Just so surely is man./ His hair are leaves,/ His skin, the outer bark./ From his skin blood,/ Sap from the bark flows forth/ A stream, as from the tree when struck./ His pieces of flesh are under layers of wood./ His fibre is muscle like strong./ The bones are the wood within/ The marrow is made resembling pith./ A tree,



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when it is felled, grows up/ From the root, anew again,/ A mortal when cut down by death/ From what root does he grow up?"

Trees are described as being superior to animals and human beings. Sadhu T L Vaswani said: "A tree is a lesson in life. A tree has patience. It stands facing the sun, rain and storm, uncomplaining. A tree is symbolic of growth. It inspires me to spread out."

The puranas exalt the tree in economic terms as wealth, as a great asset to mankind. A tree is perhaps nature's best gift to mankind. It balances our existence on earth; it provides shade in summer and fuel in winter; it is economic wealth.

It also has the spiritual qualities of *samdhristi* and humility. You hit a tree with a stone, it will give you fruit. Or as Buddha put it, it offers protection and shade even to the woodcutter who destroys it. So every tree is God-like, worthy of reverence and worship.

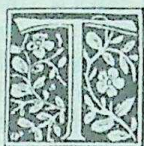
Tree worship links us with the Nature Spirit. Nature in all its moods and manifestations represents harmony and joy. We should partake of it.



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# The Ultimate Holy Book Of Humanity

By K M Gupta



HERE are three highways of Quest — religion, philosophy and science. Of these three, science is the youngest. Just 400-odd years at the most, if you start from the Copernican Theory. But in this short life it has completed its mission and achieved what the other two couldn't in thousands of years. It has swept up the entire spectrum of Revelation, defined the all-producing nature, discovered the true ultimate universal God, and come up with the ultimate explanation and ultimate ethic of phenomenal being.

Science finds out the time-space-consciousness continuum as the all-enveloping realm of being. It has not and cannot have an outside and all that are inside it are its own make by the interaction of its metric properties. Thus science sweeps up the whole range of Revelation. It defines nature as the interplay or the geometry of the metric space, which creates all. God in His manifestness of executiveness is the metric space, and in His unmanifestness or absoluteness in the Unified Field of the three metric properties that constitute the metric space — the zero degree of being or the submetric plane of being. The United Field slips into the three metric properties to create phenomenality and then slips back to itself to regain its absoluteness. This presumably goes on cyclically and that is the Ultimate Explanation. The best possible way of life man can make out from this explanation is the Ultimate Ethic.

By virtue of completing its theoretical mission and striking the best possible explanation and ethic, science is now all set to script its scripture — the ultimate Holy Book of humanity. A sketch of that scripture would run like this:

In the beginning, Being was an undiversified undifferentiated immutable featureless elemental field without dimensions. Since it was one without a second, there was no one or nothing to apprehend it, and since it was not metric it was inapprehensible anyway. Thus it was being and nothing at once.

This metric being by the interaction of its own metric properties spawned the multitudinous universe. This metricdom is now rushing through a one-way street to inexorable dissolution, as irreversibly borne out by the second law of thermodynamics. When it reaches the point of maximum entropy space will suck up the whole matter-energy, which is the content of the universe, and become absolutely blank,



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featureless, eventless. At its height, the whole space continuum will be of uniform temperature and all energy will be evenly spread over the space continuum, thus bringing in eternal stagnation.

Eternal stagnation is the sign of the breakdown of the basic structure, the skeleton, of the universe, in which the three metric properties that make up space and all that are in it relapse into their basic Unified Field — the primordial undiversified undifferentiated immutable featureless elemental field, the Being-Nothing submetric ground. This shuttling of Being between metricdom and submetricdom makes up the perpetual see-saw of creation and dissolution.

The best possible ethic of the microcosm is harmony and concurrence with the ethic of the macrocosm. The cause of phenomenal existence is the diversification of the United Field into the three metric properties and their functional imbalance. By steadily and irreversibly running into maximum entropy, Being is going at setting right the diversification and imbalance.

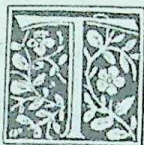
In beings, especially in humans, the three metric properties — electricity, magnetism and gravitation — act as id, ego and super ego. By trying one's best to achieve the best possible balance of id, ego and superego, and by leading them to the Unified Field through as much concentration and meditation as possible, one strikes the best possible harmony and concurrence with the macrocosm — the ultimate ethic.

When science started off well after the past millennium had crossed half its age, this world that was being imperiously ruled by religion and philosophy was just a flea-pit of ignorance, misery and destitution. There were not even clocks. The circulation of blood, the conduction of heat and the laws of motion were unknown. There was no thermometer; even the common pump was a mystery. Alchemy, magic, astrology, witchcraft and superstitions shaped all of man's knowledge, understanding, belief, attitude and approach. Heaven was a fixed vault and the stars, bright spots sewn up to it. Spirits were at work moving the planets and all, and a Celestial Policeman was at the helm of all affairs. Today, at the turn of the new millennium, science has caught up with Infinity and made it to the terminal of Revelation.



# Nataraja's Dance: Science & Intuition

By Mrinalini Sarabhai



HE ancient Vedic precepts spoke of a tremendous sense of unity with the entire universe and the divine consciousness that pervades all existence.

*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*: "All that which exists is one. The wise call it by many names". Scientists too have always emphasised this unity. Photographs of a shower of cosmic rays that hit a bubble chamber of interacting particles bear testimony to the continued rhythm of creation and destruction which Ananda Coomaraswamy called 'Poetry but nonetheless science'.

The same rhythmic movements of creation and destruction are depicted in the dance of Shiva-Nataraja, for as the inscription on stone by King Harsha states, "He creates all that is and all that is disappears into the void for he is the architect of the universe!".

Today, physicists tell us that according to the quantum field theory, the dance of Nataraja is the basis of the very existence of matter since all material particles self-interact by emitting and reabsorbing virtual particles. "Modern physics", writes Fritjof Capra, "has thus revealed that every subatomic particle not only performs an energy dance, but also is an energy dance, a pulsating process of creation and destruction". Nataraja and modern physics both tell us of the unity, the oneness of the Universe which Niels Bohr called 'complementarity'.

In scientific terms, a classical geometrodynamical electric charge is a set of lines of force trapped in the topology of space. Ancient *tantras* describe symbolically the *jatas* of Shiva arranged in a network of long wavy lines as space being permeated by lines of force (the hair) that are able to cause the fabric of space to expand and contract.

India's philosophy is as relevant today as when it was 'perceived' in the vision of our great seers, who intuited that the Universe was a great vibration, the unconditioned Supreme Cosmic force. The *Avaduta Gita* states, "Brahma is neither the knower nor the known, for the Vedas cannot establish it. The consciousness absolute cannot be described in mere words".

"How is it possible to describe to you this Eternal? Know your Self", Rishi Vasishtha tells prince Rama, "for your Self, the consciousness, is all in all. Nowhere is anything real or unreal — there is only the one true 'Essence' that is the beginning and source of all".



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Today, we seem to be forgetting this great inter-connectedness of philosophy and physics. There is above all a crisis of perception, and destruction of the norms that are the basis of a meaningful life. Names like 'energy crises', 'environment crises', 'population explosions' are routinely expounded. Slowly, the general quality of life is being eroded as we forget the oneness of existence and our role in the cosmos.

The interdependence of all that exists has been proved again and again by religion and by science. The *Vishnudharmottara*, an early treatise, points out that every discipline is connected with other forms of art, and none can be understood without this comprehension.

This awareness of the inter-relationship of all existence is to be nurtured when science and mathematics are taught in schools. Perhaps not through religion, but through quantum physics which tells us scientifically of every atom of the universe being connected. And of our being an integral part of that wholeness, so that we may learn to live together in peace and harmony. Then surely we will understand our ancient seers who wrote many centuries ago:

"Who knows in truth?

Who can tell us whence and how arose this Universe?

Only he who sees in highest heaven

He only knows or perhaps he knows not."



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# Speaking of Shiva, Soul and Salvation

By Karan Singh



IMES Music's sonorous recording of the celebrated *Maha Mrityunjay mantra*, preceded by selected devotional verses, evokes powerful images of Lord Shiva, the most awesome and yet the most gracious deity in the Hindu pantheon. In this mantra he is worshipped as the great Lord of Death and the devotee prays that he is released from bondage as painlessly as a ripe cucumber detaches itself from its stalk.

This is a telling image, because when it is ripe the cucumber detaches itself from the creeper without any trauma or pain. The prayer is: "We worship Lord Shiva, the three-eyed one, who is full of fragrance and who nourishes all beings. May he liberate us from death like a ripe cucumber but not from immortality".

Death, of course, is an inevitable correlate of birth. As the *Gita* says, "that which is born must die and that which dies must be born again". However, a crucial dimension of Hinduism lies in the concept that there is a state of consciousness that transcends birth and death in the greater Life. In the West they talk of 'life and death' as if they were terminal events, whereas our philosophy involves 'birth and death' as a cycle which can be transcended. Indeed, in this all the four Indic religions — Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism — are agreed.

It is particularly significant that the *Maha Mrityunjay mantra* seeks release from bondage but not from immortality. The Upanishads eloquently describe the *atman* which is immortal and does not die with the body. What the worshipper of Lord Shiva is saying, therefore, is that he or she seeks a painless release at the time of death. The process of death can be extremely prolonged and painful, and the prayer is that when the time comes we should be able peacefully to shed our present bodies. Secondly, the prayer reiterates the quest for immortality which has been the motivating force in the Hindu tradition ever since the dawn of civilisation.

Vedanta reiterates the immortality of the soul and its integral relationship with the divine power that pervades the universe. There are varying interpretations regarding the relationship between the *atman* and the *Brahma*, the divine within each one of us and a divine that pervades the entire cosmos. The school of Advaita holds that they are in fact one and only ignorance keeps us from merging into this unity. The



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*Vishishtadvaita* holds that although the soul is very close to the divine, it also retains its separate individuality, while the Dvaita school believes that the individual soul is forever separate but, having transcended the cycle of birth and death, remains in close and blissful proximity to the divine.

Be that as it may, Lord Shiva also manifests the triple power of the divine, notably in the beautiful concept of Nataraja — Lord of the Cosmic Dance — surely one of the great creations of human civilisation.

In his right hand the divine dancer holds the *damroo* (a small two-faced drum) which represents the primeval sound or 'word' from which all existence springs. Each beat of the damroo could perhaps be compared with a Big Bang whereby millions of galaxies spring into being. In his left hand he holds the sacred fire, which symbolises the ultimate destruction of these worlds in the aeonic cycles of time.

Had that been all, there would have been no scope of individual evolution, achievement and salvation, and that is where the special significance of his other two hands emerges. One is raised in the *Abhaymudra*, reassuring the devotee to be free from fear, and the fourth points to his upraised foot showing the path to salvation. Nataraja dances on a dwarf representing our limited human ego which has to be suppressed but not destroyed, while the nimbus around him represents the great *Kalachakra*, the unending wheel of time. All these images are evoked in Maha Mrityunjay mantra, an eternal source of inspiration and spiritual vibration.



# Alpha and Omega Of the Universe

By K M Gupta



LATO calls striving after being what Vedanta calls *Brahma jijnasa*. According to Plato, "The true lover of knowledge is striving after being. He will not rest at those multitudinous phenomena whose existence is only appearance". The *Brahma Sutra* opens with the capsule, *athato Brahma jijnasa* — "and now, curiosity for Brahma". Brahma is being; it is that out of which the world came into being, as set out in the next, second capsule: *janmadyasya yatah*.

The *Brahma Sutra* is the orderly and encapsulated presentation of Upanishadic revelations. The *Brahma jijnasa* is the jumping off point for Upanishadic thoughts. The Upanishad asks, "Have you ever listened to the instruction by which the unheard is heard, the unthought is thought, and the unknown is known?" And it adds, "Just as all earthenwares are shaped by just knowing a lump of clay — because change in the shape of a thing is just change in words; only the lump of clay is real".

A pot, a pitcher, a vase — these are changes in names; the basic stuff is the same — a lump of clay. What is the 'lump of clay' that the world is made of? Curiosity for that lump of clay is *Brahma jijnasa*.

The same question is asked in other words: By knowing what, can one know all? How can one know the knowing?

*Brahma jijnasa* is the loftiest passion of the human soul. It is the drive behind all search for knowledge and truth. It is the motor of all spiritualism. The *Rig Veda* asks, "Of what use is this *Rik* to one who doesn't get Brahma by it?" The *Brihadaranyaka* declares, "He who takes Brahmanhood as something other than striving for the Self, him Brahmanhood rejects".

*Brahma jijnasa* was the initial motive of all religions and philosophies. But they failed to keep its flame alive as they allowed themselves to be masks for man's baser instincts and passions. There is an eternal and inescapable psychological truth, and it is that the motive of all of man's thoughts and actions is inflating his ego. Religions and philosophies fell prey to this psychological 'wolf' and lost the flame of *Brahma jijnasa*.

It was when *Brahma jijnasa* was dead and gone in religion and philosophy that modern science was born. The supreme virtue of science is that, unlike religion and philosophy, it cannot be made an instrument for inflating the egos of individuals, races



and countries. It is truly and supremely impersonal and international. Religions and philosophies have their loyalties to keep to for one or the other group psyche; science owes its loyalty only to pure Brahma jijnasa.

Today, Brahma jijnasa is a flame only in science. Einstein said: "The most beautiful and the most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms — this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness".

Science's Brahma jijnasa is getting consummated in the knowledge of *janmadyasya yatah*. By looking into the distance in space it is looking into the past and its look has almost reached the birthday, nay, the birth moment, of the universe. NASA's COBE spacecraft, which made more than 300 million measurements and detected the ripples of matter scattered at the time of the 'Big Bang', is said to have deciphered the holy grail of cosmology. The Hubble telescope is another man-made machine like COBE, which can take us very close — almost to the moment of the birth of the universe itself, probably to the very beginning of time. Our technical prowess is enabling us to observe and calculate the alpha and omega of the universe.

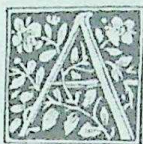
NASA's latest probe, MAP, hailed as the cosmic equivalent of the human genome project, with its unprecedented accuracy and precision, is yet another time machine set to take us to the birth moment of the universe, and draw a cosmic map.

These 'time machines' are the extended arms of Brahma jijnasa. They take us to the *janma* or birth of the universe, and reaching out to its *janma* is reaching out to *janmadyasya yatah*.



# Art Helps Gain Inner Vision

By P N Mago



ART activity essentially signified an inner journey to gain a state of visionary experience. It was an exploration of the human spirit, a revealing process that led to beauty, bliss and revelation.

According to Indian seers, the whole of nature was but the symbol of a higher reality. For, as and when an artist penetrated nature, he was transported to an inner realm which was that of intuition and mystic vision. He felt himself to be in a state of undifferentiated being; transcending the contradiction between 'I', the self and 'Not I' as signified by the external world.

He discovered that consciousness alone assumed shapes of objects — there being no material thing or object as such. Consciousness was not something distinct from the self but self itself. *Atman* was the nature of the consciousness. Indian seers knew that the state of consciousness affects the fixed and familiar state and alignment of things. Creative consciousness was connected to physical consciousness and to the material consciousness of Man — exposed to the physical, planetary environment, mental and emotional urges; *samskars* or residues in the subliminal consciousness and conceptional ideas.

Art was a *sadhna*, a spiritual endeavour for the realisation of absolute consciousness. Ancient Indian texts describe specific instructions for the artist's work — they referred to controlled trance, a technique which launched into harmony and rhythm. To get conscious control of different levels of awareness, various techniques were recommended, such as *yama*, restraint of passion or anger to enable one to explore one's mental nature; *niyama*, rule or principle, to clarify one's thoughts for observation; *asana* or body posture, to acquire control of intellect and allow the free flow of psychological forces to the body system; *pranayam*, to control prana or breath, the vital force and expansion of individual energy into cosmic energy by the controlled inhaling and exhaling of breath. *Dharna* or focused attention was advised for the fixation of total attention on an object or an idea. And meditation was to focus on the supreme spiritual journey inward. Most significant was the *samadhi* — a state of suspended animation in deep trance different from awareness like of a deep sleep, where the self was free of material conditions and self-oriented sensations.

The creative ground in the Indian tradition was beyond mind



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and speech and called *para*, the highest state which excelled all description. Shankaracharya, in his commentary of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* had elucidated on the course of gradually enlarging the ever-deeper centre of one's being and attaining 'unity' within one's self, and with all things, in reaching the core of all life in the Universe.

We must remember that the most significant role of art is to fulfil the central role of ordering our attitude and reactions to things. In view of the addition to human knowledge by modern science and high technology, psychological disturbances have appeared in our life and have added to the despair and pessimism in our lives. Man has to be liberated from the tensions and strains of life in industrial society. Creative art experience could be a means for that. The shaping of consciousness is a fundamental justification of art through the insights of his creative imagination, the artist shaped the profound and meaningful spiritual aspects of his confrontation with life.

Art was a visual representation of the artist's urge to fathom and explore the realm of his innermost being. It was the awakening of the course to the self, the supreme reality of the artist's urge to enter the sphere of the unseen.

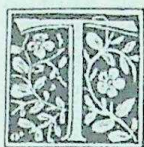
Emphasis laid on the experience of life evoked by the object leading from intervals or rhythm to the space-structure ensured an evolutionary course for human consciousness, from the physical to the higher levels of experience — in senses, emotions, intellect, mind, self or atman and pure consciousness. The quality of rhythm in a work of art was believed to be the reflection of the cosmic rhythmic order.

The Vedic poets had proclaimed the identity of the spirit of man with the spirit of the cosmos and claimed this to be a direct revelation. They had realised that the beauty of a work of art was not objective or inherent in form, material or technique, but belonged to the spirit. Self-fulfilment of a person's life could be achieved and liberated from limited consciousness and time, space-bound existence. And it was the experience of rhythm that led the spiritual journey to the destination — to be one with the universal.



# Linking Science To Spirituality

By G G Saraswat



THE absolute force or *prana* is not fictitious in nature as most people tend to believe but can be realised as a personal goal. We already know that the practice of the ancient science of yoga does not only help relieve us from different kinds of stress and tensions of modern life and keep us fit, it can also achieve the final goal of uniting the individual unit or *prana* of the body with the main universal absolute force.

One of the more scientific explanations for *prana* is that this absolute force remains hidden in our bodies mainly in the central nervous system (CNS), cerebro-spinal fluid filled in the brain cavities and the spinal canal of the spinal cord.

Different types of energy are regarded to be manifestations of the absolute force and are under control of the same force. This particular force got involved with physical creation or illusory 'matter' that manifests itself into various forms of plant and animal lives. The involvement of the absolute force is called 'involution' of the energy. Evolution, as meant in yoga is that course in which the involution of the absolute force is reversed.

The hidden, involved, absolute force can be coerced to evolve out from all body cells by the process of meditation and/or by controlled, breathing exercises. Meditation is a process in which conscious thoughts, generated by the interaction of genes, are made to enter into subconscious thoughts and their cumulative energy force leads to generate an unconscious psychodynamic power that is utilised to control the normal body currents or bio-rhythms. By will, the cumulative energy force can be focused, transformed, tuned, directed and can be made gradually and progressively super-subtle to release the body's absolute force.

This absolute force first of all starts showing its attributive properties of wave-particle duality, and then finally no motion at all — *prana*. Consequently, it becomes a non-dual, unipolar, motionless main absolute force of the universe and dissolves completely into it. The transcendental process of voluntarily dissolving individual *prana* into 'Prana', the universal force, provides full awareness or realisation of the entire cosmos and is known as the union or yoga. Therefore, prior to opening up new vistas of sciences, the researchers should be aware of the fundamentals of the energy of conscious thoughts that indirectly play a pivotal role in revealing the secrets of nature.

When conscious thoughts traverse into the vast fields of the



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subconscious thoughts of our body, a new type of cumulative force is generated by the brain and the spinal cord. This generates what are known as 'mental' forces that are linked to the CNS.

These fields of mental forces can only be detected by the mind, which gives its indications in the form of flashes of light in the CNS. This, in fact, provides clairvoyance or distant mental perception to the observer. We then see mentally what is happening elsewhere and our five senses are not involved in this perception. Distance and time make no effect on these perceptions and it cannot be mutated by any kind of field in the earth's atmosphere or outer space.

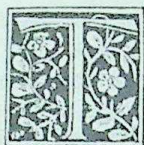
If a scientist is trained to pick up the right messages by concentrating and contemplating on the signals given by our mental forces, he or she may reach at the hidden truth in that particular field of research. When these bodily signals are focused and tuned to some living or any physical non-living matter, the conscious atoms of that particular matter will start revealing its secrets. When they are focused and tuned introvertly by biologists within their bodies, the living matter will start unfurling secret biorhythms.

Computer scientists and engineers who are dealing with intricate computer memories or various electronic systems which control computers automatically will have additional advantage if they modify their electronic circuitry, present in all sophisticated electronic systems, by storing extra bits of electrons. This should be done under the presumption that such activities can be influenced in due course by the strong wavelengths of thoughts created by human beings. It is known that modern computer memories are incorporated to a certain extent with such electronic bits. It is therefore possible to experience scientifically what in natural course is a spiritual experience.



# God & Science: Not Mutually Exclusive

By Nelliah Hariharan



HE universe has evoked either one of two responses in us humans: Fear of the unknown and awe, or a determination to find out more about the universe and how it works. From the first was born a belief in God, which ultimately took form in the great religions of the world and from the second rose the long tradition of dispassionate scientific inquiry. But science and scientists have largely been seen by the religious as abrogators of religion and all that it symbolises.

Most traditional religions assert that God is the ultimate Truth, while science, without admitting the existence of any personal God, claims that its motive force is the quest for Truth. Science and religion seldom see eye-to-eye; this is partly because science has played a big role in enhancing our material comforts. Since religion has always regarded materialistic conquests and gains as being secondary and sometimes even detrimental to our spiritual progress, the spiritually-minded have come to look upon science as a sphere of activity that denies the existence of the Divine.

It is generally forgotten that science is essentially amoral in character: It is we humans who imbue it with a certain colour, depending on the purpose for which we choose to use science. As an instrument purely for the acquisition of knowledge, science can not only be intellectually invigorating but can also eloquently justify the existence of an intelligent Creative Principle in the universe. History amply testifies to the fact that some of the greatest names in science, Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein were devout and humble believers. For, how many serious scientists can marvel at the intricate laws of planetary motion, and yet choose to reject the very notion of an intelligent cosmic Creator?

Another cause for the rift between religion and science are those scientists who publicly and forcefully emphasise their lack of faith in the existence of a Creator. But one should guard against blaming science itself for this since belief or non-belief is an intensely personal matter. Those who quote science to reaffirm their atheism will find the following anecdote about Isaac Newton interesting:

Isaac Newton had invited a scientist-friend of his, a man who professed atheism, to dine with him. Seeking to corner his friend with his own arguments, Newton placed a model of the



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solar system on his table and invited his friend to view it. Upon examining it, Newton's friend exclaimed, "What marvellous craftsmanship! Who fashioned this exquisite model?" Newton replied casually, "This model has no maker; it materialised from nothing". Disbelief writ large on his face, the friend asked, "What do you mean?" To this Newton smilingly replied, "How can you, my friend, insist that this model has to have a maker, while vehemently denying the existence of a divine Creator?"

If the practice of science is looked upon merely as an exercise of the faculty of reason with an eye on temporal material gains, it falls woefully short of its expectations as an instrument of knowledge. On the contrary, if it is regarded as a tool that probes the workings of the external, and internal world; if science can help us understand why we're here and how this whole cosmos came about; if with a scientific approach we can get closer to probing the mind of God — then it would more than fulfil its self-professed role of illuminating the human mind. Science would also then serve as something that invokes and inspires faith in God.

Therefore, one can safely conclude that science can actually strengthen, rather than weaken, our faith in God. In fact, science can even reinforce our faith in a Supreme Being. Physics and metaphysics are but the two sides of the same coin. Science has the power to ennoble us as much as religion can. While the truly pious person loves God with his heart, a truly dedicated scientist loves God with his mind.



# Physics & Vedanta: So Much in Common

By Mani Bhaumik



THE ancient Vedantic concepts that we all cut our spiritual teeth on are a part of the grand reconciliation now going on between science and religion. We find these concepts embodied in the extensive literature starting with the four Vedas and their subsequent elaborations in the Upanishads. The recurring theme of these perceptions is that, underlying all physical reality, there is one abstract entity, *Brahma*, with the quality of consciousness. Having created the universe, Brahma remains present everywhere today, administering basic aspects of everything in our cosmos.

Recent scientific discoveries seem to validate the concept of Brahma. Physicists and cosmologists are close to proving that there is one source behind the physical universe, and they call this source the unified field. In a profound sense, Brahma, the Vedantic concept and the unified field of physics appear to be synonymous.

All the physical objects and phenomena around us are not illusory or *maya*, but are quite real. However, what we see is only the tip of the iceberg. Underneath it is the interplay of an abstract substance called energy, which in turn is controlled by something even more abstract: The fields that underlie all physical reality.

The puzzle that Albert Einstein attempted to solve and which contemporary physicists are coming close to explaining is: Why, if everything is eventually made up of one single substance, energy, does nature provide different types of fields for energy to work its magic? Physicists now realise that these divisions of fields are nothing but different aspects of a single entity, the unified field.

The biography of the universe, as related by cosmologists and physicists, account for everything in its nearly 14-billion-year history except for an extremely small fraction of a second after the onset of time itself. We find that very close to the Big Bang beginning, the unified field was present in an infinitesimal nugget, and the various fields were unified at incredibly high temperatures. As the universe cooled by expansion, the fields sequentially unfolded, creating everything.

There are manifest and unmanifest fields. For example, the earth's gravitational field is a manifest field, whose operation we see in our everyday life. So are the other fields manifest in the



contents of the earth, providing various functions. But if we took the earth away from its orbit, all the manifest fields will go away with it.

However, the very significant feature of the universe is that the unmanifest fields, the essence having the blueprint, will still be there, even in empty space. Because the unmanifest quantum fields fill all space and time. Understanding this inherent primary reality of our cosmos is an essential element in grasping the concept of Brahma.

The unmanifest unified field, possessing the blueprint of everything, pervades all space being encoded in space itself. How can that be? Space appears to us to be nothing more than a stage where events are played out. However, Einstein showed that space, time and fields cannot exist separately, but are always magnificently intertwined in their operation.

It seems inevitable at this point that we should wonder whether the unified field possesses the quality of consciousness which is an integral part of the total picture of the universe. At first glance, the phenomenon of consciousness looks utterly incompatible with our general scientific view of the world. However, when examined in light of the bizarre revelations of quantum physics, consciousness is not unlike the primary reality of the quantum fields.

Some prominent contemporary physicists indeed believe that the mysteries of consciousness and quantum physics are linked. Most quantum systems have properties that are complementary and inseparable. From this perspective, the primary realities of unified field and consciousness may be viewed as inseparable aspects of the same underlying process, permeating all space and time.

Today, science and religion seem to be saying the same thing: A single entity created the universe and is still present everywhere, maintaining and governing the fundamental machinery of everything in this universe.

The author is an elected fellow of the American Physical Society as well as the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers



# Religiously Keeping Scientific Faith

By T K Datta



RECENT developments in science have brought about a dramatic change in our understanding of the cosmic landscape. We now realise that the universe is a constantly unfolding story. Against this backdrop, religion seems to be pitted against science. In fact, it appears that science has made religion intellectually implausible. Many feel that science rules out the existence of a personal God. Others think that the theory of evolution makes the entire idea of divine providence and an ordered universe implausible.

Is religion really opposed to science? The answer, perhaps, lies in how one perceives the relationship between the two. According to an American theology professor, J F Haught, there are four different ways of describing this relationship. The first way is, the belief that science and religion are fundamentally opposed to each other. Many scientific thinkers believe that religion can never be reconciled with science because it cannot prove its ideas in a straightforward way, whereas science can.

Science always tests its hypotheses and theories against experience, whereas religious ideas seem to be experimentally unverifiable to an impartial witness. Even today, many believers in God resist the findings of astronomy, physics and biology.

The second way of viewing this relationship is that of contrast. Scientists and theologians who find no hostility between religion and science argue that each is valid in its own clearly defined sphere of inquiry; one should not judge religion by the standards of science. The contrast approach tries to segregate the tasks of science and religion. Science examines the natural world empirically, while religion seeks an ultimate meaning which transcends the empirical. Science is concerned with how things happen in nature, religion with why there is anything at all, rather than nothing. Science is about causes, religion about meaning.

The third way of understanding this relationship is the contact approach. It tries to establish meaningful interaction and dialogue between the two, inspired by the inherent human urge to discover the coherence of all ways of knowing. Advocates of the contact approach believe that scientific knowledge can broaden the horizon of religious faith.

Similarly, a religious perspective can strengthen scientific endeavour. The contact approach does not wish to prove God's



existence by scientific means. It simply attempts to provide religious meaning to scientific discoveries. Both science and theology have imprints of human construction. Scientific facts are invariably interpreted by us and are, therefore, in some sense, our own constructs. The appreciation of our mind's capacity to grasp this real world is the common element that science has with theology.

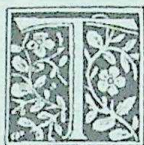
The fourth way is the confirmation approach. It is a step beyond the contact approach. The advocates of this approach propose that religion is supportive of the entire scientific enterprise. The religious claim, that the universe is a finite, coherent and ordered totality, nurtures the scientific quest for knowledge. In fact, science roots itself on a prior faith that the universe is a rationally ordered totality of things and that the human mind has the capacity to comprehend its structure. Science, no less than religion, is a quest for unified knowledge.

Religion exists because our trust in an ultimate ordered reality can fail due to constant erosion by tragedy. The central mission of religion is to maintain this trust. Science exists because of our fundamental longing for the desire to know. Religion, taken as a confirmation of the trust on limitless rationality of the real, will not obstruct; it will only promote the work of science.



# Physics of Nirvana: Link Two Realities

By Mani Bhaumik



THE Vedas describe an ultimate reality, which they call *Brahma*. The awareness of this 'reality' is attained through the practice of yoga and meditation. "*Aham Brahmasmi*" (I am Brahma) — is the statement of this realisation and identification which is synonymous with the concept of nirvana. Conceptions of Brahma and nirvana are integral to the different schools of Indian and Buddhist philosophy. However, until recently, they had not been subject to scientific scrutiny.

Physicists have discovered that the various quantum fields, which underlie all physical reality, arise from one common source, namely, the unified field. Our goal here is to show an overall connection between two primary realities — the unified field and consciousness. To grasp all this, we need to understand the quantum world in a little more detail.

Even the most sophisticated of scientific equipment does not allow us a glimpse of the natural realm of subatomic particles; we can only analyse it mathematically. At such microscopic scales of nature, particles and waves can exist simultaneously and inseparably. Quantum systems also display other bizarre behaviours, which physicists, in desperation, call quantum weirdness. For instance, a quantum particle can simultaneously be at more than one place or take more than one path.

John Wheeler and Roger Penrose, the foremost theorists about space and time, believe that the mysteries of consciousness and quantum physics are linked. Penrose insists that a universe whose laws do not take consciousness into account is not much of a universe. The theory that consciousness emerged as a natural consequence of the unique features of our universe has become a topic of much scientific discussion. It is called the anthropic cosmological principle. It proposes that the laws of nature are precisely crafted; otherwise, intelligent beings like us would not have emerged to ask the question, 'Why are these laws so accurate?'

Quantum mechanically, the universe could have started in many possible ways. The evolution of conscious beings capable of comprehending its intricacies could be a prerequisite for the beginning of our universe.

It is ironic that our prized, objective knowledge of science is



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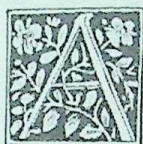
assembled through a subjective device — human consciousness. Yet some scientists consider it an epiphenomenon, implying that it is not a part of the primary reality. In quantum physics, consciousness could scarcely play a more pivotal role. No quantum phenomenon is a phenomenon until it is observed in a communicable form by a conscious observer. For example, a photon exists both as a wave and as a particle, but the individual property of a wave or a particle becomes manifest only when it is observed. The conviction of some that consciousness is an integral part of the nature of this universe is firmly based on the careful examination of the quantum nature of fundamental reality. The primary realities of the unified field and consciousness are inseparable aspects of the same underlying process, and they are united through mutual participation. Since the unified field permeates all manifest phenomena, so should its complementary aspect, consciousness.

According to our spiritual traditions, consciousness is not something that comes about merely through the functioning of neural connections in the brain, but is a basic characteristic of all reality, a spirit pervading all manifestations. The role of the human nervous system is to provide an appropriate material structure to individualise consciousness. In other words, we are the tuners of the all-pervading field of cosmic awareness. The discoveries of modern quantum physics seem, therefore, to parallel Vedic and Buddhist conjectures about the nature of reality.



# Zero to Infinity in Indian Mysticism

By T R Rajagopalan



NANTA is Sanskrit for infinity. It is equated with the Supreme Brahma — infinitely powerful and so infinitely free. It is bigger than any quantity that can be imagined; it is bigger than any finite number. Infinity is one of the fundamental axioms upon which contemporary mathematics is based.

Sanskrit grammar and interpretation in ancient India were closely linked to the handling of high value numbers. Studies relating to poetry and metrics initiated *sastragnas* or scientists to both arithmetic and grammar.

Grammarians were just as competent at calculations as professional mathematicians. Indian scientists, philosophers, astronomers and cosmographers — in order to develop their arithmetical, metaphysical and cosmological speculations concerning ever higher numbers — became at once mathematicians, grammarians and poets. They gave their spoken counting system a truly mathematical structure which had the potential to lead directly to the discovery of the decimal place-value system.

Negative numbers had been rejected as solutions of problems in early times. They were eventually admitted in Hindu practical mathematics through problems involving money transactions, since the idea of receiving and owing money was a simple and obvious one — a negative number could be interpreted as a debt. Objection to negative numbers continued up to the early 19th century. Negative numbers are the mirror image of positive numbers. The invention of Cartesian geometry brought the X, Y co-ordinates and numbers came to be represented on a graph. Today, the series of negative natural numbers go up to infinity.

In Indian mysticism, the concept of infinity and zero are very closely linked. In the *Isavasya Upanishad*, there's a line: *Poornasya poornam aadaya poornameva visishyate*. To mathematically explain this, we have to assume that the first poornam represents infinity and the second, zero. In Sanskrit, poornam means both full and zero. Indian mathematicians knew perfectly well how to distinguish between these two notions which are mutually contradictory and which are the inverse of each other. They knew that division by zero gave them infinity.

The symbol for infinity is called the lemniscate. English



mathematician John Wallis introduced this symbol for the first time in 1655. Hindu mythological iconography contains a similar symbol representing the same idea. The symbol is that of Ananta, the great Adishesha of infinity and eternity, which is always represented, coiled up in a horizontal figure of 8 just like the lemniscate.

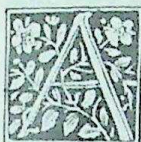
Wallis was not aware that this symbol, in Indian mythology, referred to infinity and eternity. How did two diverse civilisations use the same symbol to denote infinity, without either of them realising its use by the other? In many cosmogenics the interlace symbolises the very nature of creation, energy and all existence. It evokes *samsara* or the eternal cycle of birth and rebirth. Eternal and infinite (Ananta) are symbols of non-thought. Their value is entirely emotional. They act on our sensitivity. They invoke the peculiar sensation of the inability to imagine.

The concept of infinity has always remained an enigma. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says: *Yatho vacho nivartante, apraapya manasa saha* — where mind and speech return (being) unable to comprehend. In Indian cosmology, Ananta refers to the Adishesha or the great serpent on which Lord Vishnu reclines, taking His *yoga nidra* or *anantasayanam*. A Tamil *azhwar paasuram* (verse) says that Ananta acts as an umbrella when Vishnu walks, as a *simhasana* (throne) when He sits, as sandals when He stands, and as a bed when He reclines.



# Cosmogenesis: No Universal Theory

By Nitish Priyadarshi



LL ancient civilisations recorded the position of planets against the backdrop of fixed stars, a perfect grid. We believed that celestial bodies influenced human events. So ancient astronomy remained astrology through the Renaissance. Kepler himself believed in astrology; he drew up horoscopes for his sponsor, Emperor Rudolf and members of the court.

Some believe that the expanding universe will slow down, stop, and then collapse in a giant cosmocrunch, some 100 billion years from now. Scientists believe the universe is roughly between 10 and 20 billion years old, but details of the birth itself are still a mystery. Primitive cosmological theories were carried forward orally from generation to generation. Such conceptions were at first almost wholly religious. Only between 3500 and 4000 BC we learnt to record observations using instruments, beginning an eternal journey towards a scientific understanding of the universe.

The Assyrians and Sumerians of Mesopotamia made the earliest recorded astronomical observations. Certain star patterns and constellations were identified as readily recognisable signposts in the sky. The recognition of the 12 signs of the zodiac followed. Since the sun spends about 30 days in each of these visions, the transition to the concept of a 12-month year was easy and inevitable.

Neither the Egyptians nor the ancient Hebrews advanced much beyond astrology in their cosmologies. To the Egyptians, the universe was a rectangular box oriented from north to south, like the Nile valley, with Egypt situated at the centre of the upper surface. The ancient Jews believed that the earth was flat and that it was supported by tones.

Meanwhile, in the Far East, the Chinese were developing cosmologies essentially unrelated to those of the Mediterranean world. Chinese astronomers started recording observations of comets as early as the 7th century BC, building priceless archives, including a recording of the supernova explosion that produced the Crab Nebula.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, God is portrayed as being eternal and all-powerful. God is the great Creator who began and who will one day end the universe.

According to the Hindu calendar, as recorded in the ancient scriptures, the year AD 1977 corresponds to 1,972,949,078 years



since the present world came into existence.

Second century Egyptian cosmologist Ptolemy was convinced that the universe was spherical because only the sphere is perfect. For the same reason, he decided that stars must move in circles. According to Hebrew documents, God's first creation was not heaven and earth but light, that is, photons, a view that must delight the 'Big Bang' believers.

Bishop James Ussher, a 17th century Irish clergyman, published the *Annals of the Old and New Testaments*, a volume in which he demonstrated to his own satisfaction that creation occurred at precisely 9.30 on the morning of 28 October 4004 BC. That day must have been Monday because the Sabbath, when God rested, was seven days later. British cosmologist Stephen Hawking doesn't agree. Like most cosmologists today, Hawking is convinced that the universe came into existence between time 0 and the following trillionth of a second about 15 billion years ago.

It was Herschel, the 19th century British astronomer, who observed that the universe extended much beyond the solar system, which was itself only a small part of a much bigger star system, the galaxy. So the mysteries of the universe continue to unfold; but the more we discover, the more there is to know. Our search for celestial truths could well be an eternal one. Because, it seems, even the cosmos is not free from the cycle — of birth and death.



# Symbiosis Between Science & Spirit

By Karan Singh



OME years ago, I called upon the great scientist Prof S Chandrasekhar in Chicago and asked him how seers of the Vedas and Upanishads had two astounding insights that have emerged in modern science only recently.

The first is the concept of *anantakoti brahmanda*, endless universes. The second is the concept of vast aeons of time through which creation passes, much like the ancient belief that a single day of Brahma is 4.32 million human years long, so that his one year corresponds roughly to the age of planet earth. When I suggested that perhaps this knowledge came to seers in enhanced states of consciousness, Prof Chandrasekhar seemed to agree.

In Indic traditions, consciousness is not merely an epiphenomenon of evolving matter; rather it is the prime principle that calls forth these millions of worlds. The great icon of Shiva Nataraja portrays this kinetic universe in which all things, from galaxies to sub-atomic particles, are in flux. The drum in Shiva's left hand represents creation, while the fire in his right hand represents its destruction in the cycles of time. Shiva's other two hands point to the possibility of individual realisation amidst cosmic chaos. One hand is raised in a gesture of benediction, while the fourth points to his upraised foot as the path of liberation.

The question of consciousness and its evolution is one that has attracted some of the best minds in the world. In India, we have developed over the millennia systems of yoga which are surely the most integral exploration of consciousness ever essayed by humanity. Indian civilisation took a unique turn — our most creative minds turned the searchlight inwards towards the source of consciousness, and built an entire science based upon creative introspection. The *yoga-sutras* of Patanjali, for instance, are seminal guidelines for exploring the deeper recesses of our being.

Post-Freudian movements in western psychology have gradually developed these deeper insights, notably with C G Jung and Transpersonal Psychology. The study of consciousness has now become a respectable area for intellectual and experiential exploration. Albert Einstein's famous remark that "science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind", makes an important point.



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Before him, the Cartesian-Newtonian-Marxist paradigm of thought postulated an unbreachable dichotomy between matter and spirit. After Einstein and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, quantum mechanics and extra-galactic cosmology, the situation has changed considerably. Science is in one of its creative periods where old barriers are breaking down and we can discern outlines of a convergence between science and spirituality.

I use the term 'spirituality' advisedly, because 'religion' carries a lot of baggage, some of it negative. Spirituality transcends barriers of race, religion, creed and nationality. Seers of all great faiths have sought to describe what is essentially an indescribable experience, whether it is the Beatific Vision of the Christians, the *Bodhichitta* of the Buddhists, the *Noor-e-llahi* of the Muslims, the *Ek Onkar* of the Sikh gurus or the self-realisation of the Hindus. Clearly there are states of higher consciousness which are the heritage of the entire human race.

This flows from the persistent tradition of the light that illuminates the universe — that of consciousness itself. It is awareness of this light in all human beings that alone can become the cornerstone of a harmonious global society. What is needed is a symbiosis between the inner and the outer, the quietist and the activist, and in the broader dimension, between science and spirituality.

Extracted from the author's inaugural address at the symposium 'Science and Beyond: Cosmology, Consciousness and Technology in the Indic Traditions'



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# New Physics Points To Cosmic Spirit

By Mani Bhaumik



cover story in *Time* magazine in the 1960s proclaimed: "God is dead" and held science responsible for it. Case closed? Far from it. By the 1990s, people were talking about things like 'Can spirituality promote health?' The pendulum is now swinging in the other direction. Ironically enough, it is the same science that once killed off the notion of God that is now strengthening humankind's belief in a 'supreme power'. Latest revelations in cosmology and quantum physics are fostering this paradigm shift.

Transcending theologies and denominations, there is a conviction in a creator divinity which, having spawned the universe, is present throughout it, upholding and administering the universe. People have always accepted that God will never be revealed to us empirically. Yet for eons we have deemed this entity worthy of adoration and have directed ardent prayers to it, making it the vessel of our hope.

Now, for the first time in human history, we have objective knowledge of an entity that fills space and time throughout the universe, representing the primary elements of reality. This entity's existence, comprising unmanifest quantum fields and possessing the elemental blueprint of everything physical, rests on a solid scientific foundation. Physicists and cosmologists are also close to proving that all these fields arise from a common source that was present in an infinitesimal nugget at the inception of the universe. The source sequentially unfolded to create the universe and everything in it. We already have semi-quantitative proof, even in the absence of a complete mathematical theory. The elegance of the symmetries and incredible precision of the blueprint possessed by the source predisposes us to believe that it mirrors the intelligence of a higher power and amounts to a veritable experience of the deity.

Just as the religious God did not create the world and leave it, the source is still active through the universe. This is so because physics at extremely high temperatures that existed at the onset of the universe is equivalent to physics at fundamentally small distances. Therefore, the manifest condition at the onset of the universe is presumed to be the same in an unmanifest, quantum physical way at or near the fabric of space. The existence of the common source at the fabric of space would be no less real than the elusive denizens of empty space known to scientists as



virtual screening charges.

Persuasive evidence points to a source, which, having spawned the universe, is now present in all space and time. This entity is uncannily reminiscent of the *Brahma* of Vedanta and immanence in Christian theology. What is missing is credible evidence of awareness in this entity. The necessity for embracing a simultaneous existence of complementary properties to explain the quantum world paves the way for contemporary scientists to find an essential link between the seemingly irreconcilable mind and matter. From this viewpoint, the irreducible primary realities of field and consciousness are inseparable aspects of the same elementary process of our universe united through mutual participation; the biological nervous system just provides a material structure for unfolding consciousness in each individual.

So, plausible arguments can be made to suggest that the common source has an inherent quality of awareness, thereby giving credence to the existence of a cosmic spirit. This spirit is present in every element of space. Like fish in water, we are immersed in it. Tuning in to that awareness, realising we are part of it, will help us cope with whatever crises await us in our increasingly complex, polluted, overpopulated, overheated, over-armed, violent world. Indeed, if we become part of nature's inherently spiritual direction, we should flourish and bring meaning and purpose to our terrestrial journey.



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# Neither a Chargesheet Nor a Shopping List

By Swami Swaroopananda



AN has many desires. He also possesses the ability to fulfil them. When his desires are not fulfilled, he feels utterly miserable. Although there is infinite potential in each one of us, we cannot attain all of our desires due to our own self-imposed limitations. At such times, what can man do to remove his limitations and achieve his goals? Of all methods of self-development, prayer is considered the simplest and the most effective.

Many people pray, but few truly know the efficacy of prayer or how to pray. Prayer is generally misunderstood to be a chargesheet of complaints against God, or a shopping list of desires. Indeed, often our prayers are nothing more than sheer beggary.

So, what exactly is prayer? When we are unable to do something on our own, we pray in an attempt to tune in to some Higher Power. When we surrender in devotion at the altar of the All Knowing, the All Powerful and the All Compassionate, we liquidate our limited ego and the power of the Higher flows through us and helps us achieve that which seems difficult or impossible. This is the principle of invocation.

The universe is a cosmos not chaos. People may not believe in religion or theories of God. Even so, many people do feel that some Higher Power pulsates through, and guides the universe. Attune yourself to this Higher Power in whatever way you can, and visualise whatever form you like — whatever gives you peace, a sense of divinity and encouragement in your heart.

There are five essential steps in any prayer. The first is *Naman* (prostration). To prostrate is to have an attitude of humility. If we have to ask the Lord for something, then it must be done with humility. Very often, we approach the Lord with one of our many prides. Of these, the pride of the intellect is the most dangerous. Wealth, power and beauty come and go, but he who is proud of his intellect is never ready to accept his own ignorance, and thus remains proud and arrogant forever.

The second step is *Smaran* (invoking). This is to invoke the presence of the Lord in our mind or in the heart. For that Higher is not merely an idol, symbol or concept. That is a living Reality, the Absolute Truth. Call the Lord with love to listen to your prayer.

The third step is *Kirtan* (praise). Praise is never for the Lord.



He does not need it. But it is only when we praise or revere someone that we are capable of surrendering our ego. It is only when we surrender our ego at the altar of love and respect that His divinity flows through us.

The fourth step is *Yaachan* (asking of boons). We should first invoke the Lord's presence, praise Him and then ask Him for what we need. Ask not merely for things. Ask for strength, intelligence and knowledge. With only strength, we are unable to achieve much. Intelligence is also necessary. And without the right knowledge, the intellect is of little use. Having got these by the grace of the Lord — need one ask for more?

The fifth step is *Arpan* (surrender). Now that we have asked something of the Lord, should we not offer Him something in return? But what could we possibly offer the Lord that he does not already have? We should offer what we have in plenty, and that which God has none. These are the five *kaleshas* and the six *vikaras*. The *kaleshas* are all the miseries caused by ignorance, likes, dislikes, fear of death and the ego. The *vikaras* are the six poisons of the mind which cause agitation — lust, anger, greed, attachment, arrogance and jealousy. Offer all these so that the Lord can take them away from you.

Thus, in the process of praying, we should prostrate in all humility (*naman*), invoke the Higher Power that flows through the universe (*smaran*) and sing the glories of the Lord (*kirtan*). While surrendering our many weaknesses (*arpan*), we may ask for our boons (*yaachan*).

Remember that prayer is not only for asking for something. No gain is a gain until and unless we recognise what we have and what we have gained. Prayer should also be out of our sense of appreciation and gratitude. If prayer may not change things for us, at least it will change us.

The author is in charge of Chinmaya Mission's activities in Australia, New Zealand and the Far East



# AUM: The Sound That Liberates

By P V Narayana Swamy



THE *Mandukya Upanishad* starts with an arresting declaration: "The word AUM is all this, that was in the past and all that would be in future. That which is beyond all these is also AUM. All this is *Brahma*. The *atman* is *Brahma*. The *atman* has four divisions".

'This' here refers to the *atman*, the indweller, and 'that' denotes the external world.

*Brahma*, according to Sankaracharya, is the one and only unassailable truth. The world is relatively unreal. The *jiva* is nothing but *Brahma*, though the former is conditioned by *upadhies*, *vasanas* or impressions.

Thus the *mahavakya* or aphorism of truth: "I am *Brahma*" or *Aham Brahmasmi*: — is an eloquent version of idea of AUM: *Atman* and *Brahma* are synonymous. A still further epigrammatic expression is — "I am He", *Soham*. AUM is the distilled essence of *Soham*. The root of AUM is *ave* — to protect.

According to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, AUM, the *pranava*, loses itself in *samadhi*, the superconscious state, during contemplation. *Pranava* is that which pervades life or runs through *prana* or breath.

In AUM, 'A' represents the waking state, *viswa*; 'U' represents the dream state or *taijasa*; and 'M' the deep sleep state, *prajna*. The inevitable pause of silence between two successive chants of AUM stands for *turiya* or the fourth division, which is marked by a condition of absolute bliss and is a gateway to *Brahma* to the successful seeker.

To elaborate further, the first letter of the alphabet refers to *viswa* which experiences the world of objects. Dream is generally a reflection of our impressions gathered in the waking state and is typified by 'U' which comes next to 'A' sound-wise, and is between 'A' and 'M'. The dream state is no doubt an intermediate stage between waking and deep sleep. Deep sleep marks the last aspect of a resting mind, and this is typified by 'M'.

As an aid to meditation, AUM constitutes a prop of inestimable value. In chanting AUM, one should by insensible degrees and in sequential order identify 'A', 'U' and 'M' respectively with *viswa*, *taijasa* and *prajna* as the pronunciation of 'A' rises, of 'U' falls and 'M' subsides. The exercise is followed with linking *turiya* with silence or *Brahma*.



The basic idea is that AUM represents the manifest world, and the unmanifest — what is beyond — is thus underscored. Brahma is the fundamental, ultimate, imperishable changeless sub-stratum against which the multifarious changes take place in the multitudinous names and forms in creation. Brahma is the noumenon transcending all phenomena. AUM as atman the indweller is a silent witness to all our experiences in the different states of consciousness, but remaining unaffected by any. The fundamental tenet of non-duality in Advaita philosophy is realised: that the macrocosm and microcosm are one, not two.

The chanting of AUM is no less helpful for controlling the mind — a basic *sine qua non* for spiritual evolution. AUM signifies God with form for the lay seeker, and God without form for the advanced aspirant. In the preliminary stage AUM serves as a support, and enthruses one later to do away with it to soar into the lofty realms of the formless God — the *Nirguna Brahma*. Truly the manifest is the “Open sesame” — to the unmanifest.

Our ancient rishis had established an intimate relation between mind and breathing. When breathing is smooth and rhythmic, the mind is calm and collected. Pranayama is a yogic exercise to regulate the mind. A simple procedure is to inhale slowly through the left nostril for one unit of time, retain for four units and exhale through the right nostril in two units. The units of time are measured in terms of chanting AUM once, twice etc maintaining the ratio one-four-two.

The cycle is repeated alternately with the left and right nostrils. AUM thus lends itself as an instrument to control the mind.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna avers that whoever chants AUM at the time of death gets liberated. He also hastens to add that, man being a creature of his own thoughts cannot think of Him at the last moment unless he cultivates the habit constantly and continuously throughout his life.



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# Eternal Nature of Gayatri Mantra

By Krishna Acharya Bhatnagar



human being's most important and sacred duty is to remember God by singing His glory for all the bounties he has bestowed on humankind. For the Hindus, Vedic prayers are very sacred. Hymns of the Vedas are known as mantras. Some of the mantras are prayer-mantras. One such hymn in the *Yajur Veda* is the *Gayatri mantra*. It is a *Beej mantra* or seed syllable, derived from ancient primeval sounds.

The origin of the text of the Gayatri mantra has been elaborated in the *Manu Smriti*: "Brahm milked out, as it were, from the three Vedas — *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Sama Veda*, the letter 'A', the letter 'U' and the letter 'M' and formed by their coalition — three monosyllables, together with three mysterious words — *Bhur*, *Bhuvah* and *Svah* or earth, sky and heaven". Thus the text of the Gayatri mantra was composed as *Om bhur bhuvah, svah, tat savitur varenyam, bhargo devasya dheh mahi, dhiyo yo nah prachodyat*. The mantra is conceived as the worship of Lord Hari, of Aditya or the Sun and also as pure *nirguna* worship of Brahma.

Japa or chanting of this mantra with concentration and understanding, ushers in mental peace, calm and solace. According to the *Agni Purana*, the syllable 'ja' destroys the birth and death cycle and the syllable 'pa' destroys all the sins. Thus *japa* of this mantra has the potential to unite the soul with the supreme being.

It has miraculous powers which can infuse us with courage and confidence. In the battlefield of Kurukshetra, in the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma advises Yudhishtir to recite the 'spiritually powerful' Gayatri mantra. A wonderful miracle was witnessed when the late Swami Gitananda performed guru puja in Pondicherry. "The flower plates shook with powerful vibrations of the chanted mantras, and glasses of water shivered, bubbled and frothed." In this mantra there is latent spiritual power which by regular *japa* and meditation can transform the mind into *pragya* or wisdom.

Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Amongst the mantras I am Gayatri". Goddess Gayatri Devi is the incarnation and manifestation of Brahma, who resides in all living beings. The Gayatri mantra is also known as *Savitri* or Sun mantra. It is addressed to the divine power in the Sun.

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* says: "The one affluent divinity



is hidden in all beings. He is all-pervading and is the inner-self of all creatures. He presides over all actions and all beings reside in Him. He is the inner-witness. He endows all with consciousness and He is nirguna or free from the three gunas". Almost similar exposition of this mantra has been given in *Isa Upanishad*. However, the Rig Veda has defined this mantra from a different angle. "The illumined sages like Surayah constantly see that infinite all-pervading supreme reality Vishnu without any obstruction as though their vast intuitive eye or vision was spread over the spiritual sky".

All Vedic prayers have emerged from Om, which is synonymous with Brahma, and have 'Om' as prefix. Om is a primeval sound. Exhaustive exposition of this mystic word has been given in the *Mandukya Upanishad*, the gist of which is: "The word Om is this, that was in the past and all that would be in future. That which is beyond all this is also AUM. Om represents all physical and astral bodies, both manifested and unmanifested, from the external-most physical to the internal-most spiritual on four cosmic planes."

Before recitation of the Gayatri mantra *pranayama* is immensely beneficial both for the mind and body. This helps in concentration. There is a very simple mechanism for this breathing exercise. Plug the right nostril by right hand thumb and then breathe deeply by left nostril as long as possible. Then exhale slowly through the right nostril. This exercise may be repeated as many times as possible.

Recitation of the Gayatri mantra can be *vachik* or chanting loudly, so that it is audible to listeners; *upansu* or reciting in a very low voice and *mansik* or mental chanting. The last one is most effective. Gayatri is a spiritual weapon which protects one who chants it, and blesses him with brilliant light of the highest spiritual illumination. Japa of the Gayatri mantra is a specially designed, efficient spiritual ritual for the realisation of the divinity of the self. It is *nitya karma*.



# Action Spurred by Heart-felt Prayer

By Ajit Singh



THE English collector of Coimbatore, John Sullivan, was camping at Dimhatty, a jerkwater hamlet near Kotagiri. It was the year 1819. As the evening drew on, he stood on the jerry-built embankment, surveying the hutments below. His worst fears came true when he heard a distant rumble in the skies. In no time peals of thunder rent the air and jagged flashes of lightening criss-crossed the skies. He could see sheets of rain water advancing rapidly towards the village. "O God, the whole village is going to be washed away", he moaned. He fell to his knees and prayed, a lump in his throat, eyes brimming. In a while the water storm receded into the distance, and the last rays of the sun touched his sombre face.

In 1978, Baba Muktanand, the sage of Ganeshpuri, was camping in Delhi for the inauguration of a chapter of his ashram, in Bhatti Gaon. As the sky was clear, food had been prepared alfresco for a couple of thousand devotees. The weather suddenly turned inclement and as there were no arrangements on standby, a chill went up the spines of the organisers. In their desperation they made a beeline to Baba and begged his intercession. Baba withdrew to his room to meditate. After 20 minutes, when he emerged from his room, there was not a trace of rain clouds over the area, though rain could be seen falling on the other side of the fence.

These two events separated by a time span of 159 years and a distance of about 2,800 km, are remarkably similar in their construct. Sceptics are likely to dub these incidents mere coincidence and brand the believers, superstitious, but Mahatma Gandhi spells out his deep-set conviction unequivocally: "The sky may be overcast today with clouds, but a fervent prayer to God is enough to dispel them." He reiterates: "Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action."

A number of studies conducted by medical scientists, over a time, have tried to make a case for the salutary effect of prayer on people suffering from cardiovascular, immune, and other disorders. Herbert Benson, a Harvard Medical School professor, told a conference recently that saying a few prayers can trigger the mind, lower high blood pressure and even cure infertility. However, the prayers had to be emotionally



surcharged to be effective.

This agrees marvellously with what Mother Teresa says: "Our words are useless unless they come from the bottom of the heart. Prayer to be fruitful, must come from the heart and must be able to touch the heart of God." Mother Teresa, for whom everything starts from prayer born of the silence of the heart defines prayer as simply talking to God. She enjoins us to speak to God from the fullness of our heart and to keep our hearts silent, empty, expectant and motionless to receive God's voice because God speaks only in the silence of your hearts.

Today, researchers are putting their heads together in a bid to validate scientifically certain ancient truths. Recent studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, claim that the whole universe or rather the multiverse, at the quantum level, is a conglomeration of electromagnetic vibrations of various frequencies. Our body has also been found to be an electrical system exhibiting two types of electromagnetic fields. While the internal organs such as the brain, the nervous system and the heart emit low frequency electrical impulses of the AC type, the outer shell, our skin, exhibits a high frequency energy field. This outer energy field radiates a luminous 'aura' which engulfs the whole body from top to toe and also acts as a screen against any onslaught of unfavourable vibrations from the outside.

For prayers to be heard, they should be broadcast on thought fields of very high frequency — which is possible only when thoughts are surcharged with emotion — to facilitate their passage through the auric field, finally to reach out to and resonate with the higher frequencies of the Cosmic Intelligence. If, on the other hand, our prayers lack intensity, that is, if they ride low frequency thoughtwaves, they cannot get across the auric field and therefore remain unanswered. However, in the case of prayers larded with impure emotions, it was found that while the amount of electromagnetic energy was enhanced and the physiology stimulated, the frequency of vibrations could not be increased and as such the prayers remained unanswered.



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# Temples as Places Of Deep Insight

By Dinesan Namboodiripad



TEMPLES and other places of worship play a significant role in cultural reformation. The innate vibrations, cultural complexion, and spiritual qualities resonate all around the devotee. So they are more than places of worship; they are cultural rendezvous centres for traditional community activities. They are also meeting places for families and friends.

The serving and server concept between the *paramatma* (cosmic consciousness) and the *jeevatma* (body consciousness) is discernible during worship. Temple means body or embodiment. Our ultimate goal is to attain *moksha* — renunciation without pre-conditions. On obtaining liberation from worldly possessions, the seeker becomes one with the *Brahma*. Regardless of the kind of worship, truth-realisation can remove the pall of gloom cast by worldly possessions. Knowing oneself is to know the truth and for this, regular interaction with the learned is necessary.

Once sage Narada asked Lord Vishnu to explain the guru-shishya relationship. Lord Vishnu asked Narada to travel to earth where a worm would explain the relationship to him. Narada reached the worm. As he was about to speak, the worm died.

Narada returned to Vaikuntha. Lord Vishnu next asked him to go and meet a newborn calf. The moment Narada met the calf, it too fell down dead. Narada returned, disappointed. Next, Vishnu sent him to a king's newborn son. Narada reached the palace where the newborn welcomed him and said that the worm and the calf he had earlier visited were in fact he, and just the sight of Narada had been sufficient for the two species to attain liberation. The baby's reply removed all of Narada's doubts.

The story suggests that even one's proximity to an enlightened person can have a positive influence. However, not many people get an opportunity for this kind of interaction. Herein lies the importance of a temple. The *thanthri* or head priest breathes life into the temple.

Literally, *thanthri* means someone who helps one to escape from worldly wants. The *thanthri* does that by chanting sacred mantras, which are powerful when chanted in special ways, described as *udaatham*, *anudaatham* and *swaritham*. There are five different types of *pujas*: physical cleansing of the



temple, collecting flowers for rituals, offering flowers to the deity, chanting different mantras, and meditation.

Temples enable devotees to share sacred and blissful experiences that the yogi has attained through rigorous and painstaking sadhanas. These experiences are often displayed and illustrated on temple walls. The *sringara rasa* is given importance in such illustrations.

Sringara denotes the sublime union of *prakriti* and *purusha* or jeevatma and paramatma. The temple is constructed, taking into consideration the intellectual, mental and physical aspects of the devotees. Since the same intricate methods with which a human body is created are also employed in the construction of a temple, the rich cosmic vibrations present in the temple get transmitted to the devotees. When the devotee walks around the deity in a clockwise direction the vibrations from the sanctum sanctorum reach him through the *surya nadi* or *eda*.

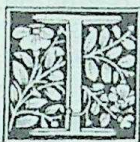
Similarly, acts like prostration, and giving offerings to the temple equip the devotee for realisation. Temples also help the devotee realise goals in life and thus gradually detach from worldly pleasures. Through noble deeds, the mind is equipped to absorb and realise the truth. The 'realised' devotee tends to evolve from temple worship to self-worship. One starts to worship oneself and this helps realise that the devotee is one with the divine and is thus heading towards nirvana.

The author is chief priest, Srikrishna temple, Guruvayoor



# Mystical Nature of Soundless Sound

By Kailash Vajpeyi



IN a world full of cacophony and chaos, it does seem a little odd to talk about soundless sound. Interestingly, soundless sound or *anaahat* has been given equal importance in almost all systems of faith. Chanting is articulated sound. The concept is echoed in other cultures also.

The Bible states: "In the beginning was the word" (John 1.1). Vedic scriptures also affirm that the entire cosmic creation began with sound (*Brihadrayanaka Upanishad* 1.2.4.). 'God is word' denotes the physicality of sound but the concept of *nada*, that 'God is sound', is more subtle, because it is related to the Sanskrit word *nadi*, denoting our stream of consciousness. Before explaining the concept of *ajapa* or soundless sound, we must know about the power of the sacred word or sound.

Steven J Rosen, who wrote *The Hidden Glory of India*, says that a device called tonoscope, graphically demonstrates the power of Sanskrit syllables to evoke forms in a physical medium. The tonoscope is a tube suspended over a thin membrane and covered by a layer of fine dust. When sounds are broadcast through the tube, corresponding designs form in the dust that can tell us something about the initial sound that went through the tube. "While most sounds produce random ill-defined forms, the vibrations of Sanskrit syllables produce quite a different result. If the sounds of mantras can activate a gross element such as dust, one can only imagine the power such vibrations have on human consciousness," he says.

The power of the spoken word, especially *japa*, has been described in other cultures also. Saint Paul said: "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10.15). "From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised," said King David (Psalms 113.3). The Buddha declared: "All who sincerely call upon my name will come to me after death and I will take them to paradise" (*Vows of Amida Buddha* 18).

*Ajapa* is basically related to electrophysiology. Silent chanting generates a kind of *tapas*, which flows in a rhythmic wave pattern. Hans Berger, a German physicist, discovered that not only all living tissues are sensitive to electric currents, but after a certain time the tissue itself generated small voltages. Today, Hans Berger's experiment has been broken up into many components by instruments that can detect fluctuations as small



as one ten-millionth of a volt. It would take about 13 million of such currents to light a small flash light bulb.

The audibility of sound waves depends on their frequency and velocity. A sound wave may be audible or inaudible, depending upon the medium through which it travels. All sound is the result of some sort of striking. That is why it has a beginning and an end. But if there could be a sound which is unstruck, then it will have neither a beginning nor an end. Heard and unheard both, it will definitely be imperishable.

A perfect example of soundless sound is described by Puran Singh in his book *The Story of Ram*. Puran Singh arranged a series of lectures by Swami Ram Tirth in Japan which evoked tremendous response. Puran Singh who authored Swami Ram's biography, writes: One night after dinner when Swami Ram went to sleep, around 12.30, he (Puran Singh) heard a feeble sound as though someone was saying Ram..Ram...Ram. Puran Singh got up and opened the door — but no one was there in the corridor. After a gap of about half an hour he again heard the same sound. This time he entered the room of Swami Ram. To his utter surprise he discovered that though Swami Ram Tirth was fast asleep, the room was resounding with Ram naam which was coming from his body rather than from his mouth.



# Music with Mantras: A Divine Experience

By Swami Sukhabodhananda



feast of heavenly music awaits those who can tune in. If you don't know how, you can learn the art from the science of *Mantra Yoga*. The world around us is full of vibrations. Tyagaraja created a raga upon hearing the hum of a bee. But only a pure mind can receive the finer vibrations. Mantra Yoga helps us purify our minds.

The mind is impure when the male and female energies in us are not balanced. Mantras help us balance them. Dominance of masculine energy results in more aggressiveness; it needs to be balanced by passiveness that is a feminine energy. When one has more of acceptance, the female energy is dominant; so it has to be balanced by male energy or aggressiveness.

In *pranayama*, balancing is achieved through Moon and Sun energies, or *Chandra-Surya bedha*. In *asana*, balancing is achieved through physical postures. In music also, balancing the energies produces pleasing results. The art of balancing is one of the great disciplines in Indian scriptures.

In the science of Mantra Yoga, the balancing is achieved through certain mantras focused on specific *chakras* and invoking energy centres. Plants too have certain energies and according to *Ayurveda*, when these energies are pooled, various forms of medicines are created.

The ego is also the effect of an imbalanced energy. The ego creates more pain than joy. The ego takes away our true freedom and binds us to our points of view. Both sanity of purity and insanity of the ego will be realised by chanting of mantras. The ego's vibrations are gross and it is bound by the gross. The vibrations of mantras are subtle and the state of egolessness is also subtle — so one can get in tune with these vibrations.

When one is 'egoless', then one's sufferings too become sacred. Our struggles have a cosmic purpose. When our minds are filled with devotion through chanting of a powerful mantra, we can make our struggles sacred. So we have to wait.

In the field of consciousness, when grace descends, a quantum leap happens which transforms our inner state. When grace descended on Kalidasa, he became a great poet. When you systematically learn how and when to chant various mantras, your third eye opens. Then one sees the deeper and finer vibrations that make life fulfilling.

Ramanuja was a great mathematician. While solving a



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Mantras chanted with devotion and understanding purify the mind. With the mind purified, whenever we imagine we know what our mind wants, watch the imaginations of the mind so that we can catch them as they are created and hence don't get blown by our internal subjective reality.

If we uncheck these imaginary processes, then they become mechanical. A negative system is thus created. These negative systems in turn take over our lives. We lose control and the negative system will sit on the throne of our life. One will become more unconscious and suffer from this mechanical process. For example, if one goes on seeing unpleasant things in life, this becomes a habit. Then a negative system is created. Then one will helplessly see the negative. The system will start justifying why one is doing what one is doing. The system will try to protect itself. The system gets into survival mode. Then one will not live in the cosmos but in chaos.

Mantra Yoga is a great science to dismantle this negative system and create a great inner order. When the inner world of our mind is orderly, then one will see the external world more orderly.



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# Spiritual Quotient Leverages IQ & EQ

By R Venkatesan



**S**OLVING logical or strategic problems involves the use of rational intelligence. Psychologists who devised tests to measure rational intelligence termed their measure as "Intelligence Quotient (IQ)", their hypothesis being that higher the IQ more is the rational intelligence. Initially, the IQ included only verbal and mathematical-logical capabilities. Howard Gardner's 1983 book *Frames of Mind* refuted the narrow IQ view and extended the concept to include spatial capacity, physical fluidity, musical capability, inter-personal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence etc. The operative word in his view of intelligence was multiple. While the utility of IQ in identifying potential performers is not disputed, according to renowned psychologists IQ contributes only about 20 per cent to the factors that determine life success, which leaves 80 per cent to other forces. As Gardner in one of his articles observes, "One's ultimate niche in society is determined largely by non-IQ factors, ranging from social class to luck".

In the mid-1990s, Daniel Goleman popularised the "Emotional Quotient (EQ)" — a degree of emotional intelligence, awareness of one's own and other people's feelings such as empathy, compassion, motivation and the ability to respond to pain or pleasure appropriately. His basic hypothesis was that for an effective use of IQ, EQ is a necessity. He writes: "In a sense we have two brains, two minds — and two different kinds of intelligence, rational and emotional. How we do in life is determined by both — it is not just IQ, but emotional intelligence that matters."

The millennium contribution in the area of intelligence was from Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall who coined the term "SQ" for "Spiritual Intelligence". They argue that the SQ is the basic foundation for an effective use of EQ and IQ. They also refer to it as the soul's intelligence. While rational, logical thinking gives one's IQ, and the associated habit-bound, pattern recognising emotive thinking gives one the EQ, the creative, insightful, rule-making, rule-breaking thinking with which we reframe and transform our previous thinking gives one the SQ.

On a scientific plane, the brain's serially connected neural tracts, and neural networks, are associated with the IQ and EQ respectively. Singer's work on the unifying neural oscillation offers the first evidence of SQ. Just as the whole can be greater



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than the sum of its parts, SQ allows one to add a larger, deeper and richer context to the present. She evolves a model of SQ based on the six petals of the lotus and its centre, corresponding to the seven *chakras* described by the Hinduism's *Kundalini Yoga*.

Can we identify, measure and improve on our SQ, and thereby effectively use our EQ and IQ? The Indian philosophical treatises — the Upanishads — attribute perception to the mind, conception to the intellect and “illumination” to the Self. They speak of the ascent from Intellect (IQ) through meditation. Meditation is the route to the highest knowledge (illumination), when self-realisation, which is integration of inner self or spirit into the cosmic spirit, occurs. For instance, in the *Sahaja Yoga* mode of self-realisation it is propounded that body is not the whole self.

The vehicle of influence is the subtle body parallel to physical body wherein there are seven chakras, chief nerve centres; three tracks of nervous energy called *nadis*; and the latent energy coiled within called Kundalini. When Kundalini rises from the base of the spine, it integrates the seven main chakras, and the subtle experience manifests itself in a flow of cool vibrations, which can be felt on the hands and also over the crown of the head like a cool breeze. It is through these vibrations that we gain a new awareness beyond thought, beyond emotions; with this subtle awakening we become sensitive to the state of our chakras and those of others.

This degree of sensitivity to the state of our chakras and those of others can be termed as SQ. Our EQ is enhanced with the rise of SQ as each chakra when cleaned with the Kundalini energy enhances our ability to emote. For instance, as per Sahaja Yoga, the first chakra enhances your ability to be “child like”, the second enhances creativity/aesthetics, the third inculcates a feeling of satisfaction, the fourth helps you control anger, the fifth improves your communication skills so that you do not offend others, the sixth enables you to forgive, while the seventh, the crown chakra allows you to integrate all these qualities so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



# The Price We Pay For Our Pleasures

By S H Venkatramani



UBCONSCIOUSLY, we believe that to be virtuous we have to suffer. Right from childhood it is dinned into us that the straight and narrow path of goodness and virtue bristles with thorns. On the contrary, the path of sin and vice is a bed of roses. In school, we found that being a good student meant a lot of hard work and trouble. It meant sacrificing fun and play with friends. To fare well in studies, you had to pore painstakingly over ponderous tomes while your classmates were happily playing cricket on Sundays.

In all our fables, saintly souls who demonstrated proverbial endurance on earth in the face of formidable odds made it to heaven after death. Emperor Harishchandra showed fortitude in not straying from the path of truth in spite of the suffering he underwent; and the gods finally showered their blessings on him. Dhruva prayed to Maha Vishnu standing on one foot in a spirit of total religious devotion. He chanted '*Om Namō Narayanaya*' for an eternity in rigorous *tapasya*, Lord Vishnu finally appeared before the young boy and blessed him that he would shine forever on earth as the resplendent Pole Star. The unwritten message that we imbibe, deep down in our bones, from all this is that we must necessarily experience pain and suffering to uphold certain moral values and ultimately merit heaven. Pain is the price that we have to pay to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Bible clearly states: "Many are called, but few are chosen". King Harishchandra's life and Dhruva's personal chanting and meditation were in themselves not intrinsically exalting or fulfilling. They were the unavoidable painful means to a worthy end. We also subliminally believe that a sinner will have to pay for his sins in some distant future. Every Judas meets his nemesis. He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind. The mills of God grind slowly, but surely.

Is the prospect of a reward in some distant future the only incentive for us to do virtuous deeds? Is the certainty of future punishment the only deterrent for us to desist from sin? After all, deep down in the centre of our being, we are scared of the final day of reckoning when God, the supreme arbiter, will dispense justice to each of us on his divine scales. But in reality, regardless of whether there is a cosmic system of dispensation of justice or not, virtue is its own happy and fulfilling reward,



and vice carries within itself the seeds of its own punishment.

In the holistic Buddhist perspective, vice and sin are themselves the result of a self-punishing and mistaken response to the challenge of human life. This response arises from a mindset that places the greedy, lustful or egoistic individual in a self-defeating conflict with the real world. We do not have to punish a child that thrusts its finger into the fire. One of the most powerful insights of Buddhism is that you commit sin because you suffer from a delusion. It is this delusion which the Upanishads and Adi Sankaracharya have called *maya*. This delusion creates in the individual the sense of separateness of his self, distinct from the universe and nature or *prakriti*. A sense of self, separate from the fundamental flow of reality called the *Tao* of being. A delusion of human separateness which Dante describes as infernal.

According to Buddhism, sin should intrinsically cause revulsion. Not because the sinner will be consigned to the flames of Hell after death. Not that the state police will ultimately catch up with his misdemeanours. Sinning should be innately repulsive because it originates from a failure to deal with the delusion of human separateness from the natural flow of being. Therefore, it is bound to lead to further unhappiness and suffering.

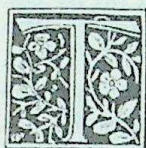
The way out of the suffering inherent in sin is to make ourselves fully and deeply attentive to the nature of what we imagine, in our delusion, to be the stimulus for our happiness. We will then perceive the real cost of our selfish striving for sensual pleasure, and the inevitable but futile craving to perpetuate it when it is fundamentally transient.

As the young boy realises the nature of fire by burning his finger in it, we will then see, clear as daylight, what it is costing us to acquire wealth and luxury. We will then see the suffering that all sensual pleasure entails, and pluck out its roots.



# The Metaphysics of Minority Report

By Vikas Singh



HERE'S a reason why religions have mythologies. Because it's much easier for individuals to identify with heroic tales than with dry metaphysics. And contrary to what we might believe, all mythology is not frozen in times gone by. It is being created around us every day, in the Harry Potter books, in the movies of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. Generations from now, our descendants may well look back and say Lucas and Spielberg were the Homers and Virgils of our age — storytellers who narrated tales extremely well, but slipped in a larger message.

Take, for example, Spielberg's latest, *Minority Report* — a brilliant cinematic exposition of Philip K Dick's short story. At one level, the movie is an eye-popping techno-thriller, not so much a whodunit as a will-he-do-it? But the special effects are just the icing; the cake is that the film is an allegory for the eternal philosophical conflict between determinism and free will.

The story very briefly is: Tom Cruise is a cop who prevents murders foreseen by psychics, known as 'pre-cognisants'. Everything is fine, till one day the pre-cogs predict that Cruise will commit the next murder. But now that he knows his future, is he doomed to uphold it?

It's easy to see the story as a battle between organised religion and rational libertarianism. The references are obvious: the pre-cogs are called 'oracles', their enclosure is 'the temple', one of the cops points out that members of the pre-crime squad are like priests. But there is much more to the conflict than just this aspect. Utterly rational atheists can be every bit as deterministic as devout believers. The role ascribed to fate by religion is similar to the one attributed to history by Marxists. Some scientists believe that humans are nothing more than a bunch of chemicals, programmed to respond in particular ways to different stimuli. Then there are the psychologists who would argue that we act in a certain way today because of what happened to us as infants.

These arguments are seductive, because they downplay responsibility. But they are also dangerous, because to forego responsibility is to forego choice, and down that path lies individual disempowerment. Totalitarian ideologies rest on the belief that the individual counts for little, that his life is shaped



by forces greater than him. Liberal democracy alone argues that the individual is important and deserves choice. Where there is choice, there will be dissent, but that is a price well worth paying.

In the 18th century, Immanuel Kant wrote *Critique of Pure Reason* to counter the increasing nihilism brought on by the scientific revolution. Was humanity really an accident in the evolutionary chain, with no greater purpose? No, argued Kant. Man was not the means to an end, he was himself the end. His life was driven and shaped by a moral pressure from within. There was no role for God as architect of the scientific universe in Kant's scheme of things. But there was an important role for God within the human soul.

Kant's arguments may comfort those who believe in God. But what about those who can't take the idea of a cosmic accountant seriously, yet are repelled by the wasteland of nihilism? Perhaps the metaphysics of *Minority Report* holds some hope for them. Yes, we are all shaped by various influences. But we are ultimately greater than the sum of our parts. There is no force greater than the human will. We can make choices that rise beyond the obvious. And just as we make our choices, our choices, in turn, make us.

We are what we choose to become. And if we so choose, we can thrust greatness upon ourselves.



# Sukha and Dukha: Rise Above Them

By Dipankar Khanna



UKHA, or happiness, means different things to different people. This is especially so in the context of varying lifestyles prevalent today and the issues that a lot of us are living with and identifying ourselves with.

Is happiness really the excitement of FIFA football matches or Gumball rallies? Is it really connected with excitement reaching a feverish pitch, as we watch with bated breath the outcome of a one-day cricket match — of the last ball or watching the rank-outsider win the derby by a short head?

The hysteria accompanying an excessive and loud lifestyle needs to be looked at so that we can determine whether we can really hope to find true and long-term happiness through such indulgences.

To actually expect *sukha* or happiness in the make-believe world of psychedelic lights and the rhythmic beats of discotheques is as far removed from genuine happiness as taking a mirage-oasis to be capable of quenching one's thirst. These are the make-believe worlds ventured into by disturbed and insecure individuals with low self-esteem and belies any hope of *sukha*. Mirages and delusions cater to the sensate and the immediate at the cost of slamming the lid on our sensibilities and our innocence.

*Sukha* in Indian philosophical systems is a heavily loaded term. To understand the quality of true *sukha* also means that we need to define *dukha* or suffering.

Lord Buddha was very clear in his definition of suffering and about what constitutes true happiness. He propounded as the cornerstone of his teachings the four noble truths. These truths according to him were intrinsic as well as peculiar to *samsara* and the inhabitants of *samsara* and pervaded all *samsaric* activity.

These four noble truths or *arya-satya* were the truth of suffering, its cause, the cessation or end of suffering by realising true happiness and the method or path leading to cessation of suffering and of attaining to a state of true happiness.

*Sukha* as experienced by the wise sages and yogis, is something that is peaceful, serene, harmonious, and happy. Yet, at the same time, it is not exuberant.

A smooth flow of energy accompanied by calmness projects



steadiness and an integrating quality. The yogi immersed in his cauldron of true happiness and bliss conjures up the image of a being, that is alone in this vast ocean of humanity. He is a part of, yet remains quite apart and is ever growing in his knowledge of God's will for him and having the power to carry out the role God has planned or determined for him.

In the yogi one finds a cosmic whole that far from being in the nature of a black hole is more in the nature of a quasar, the brightest object in the universe. Against the backdrop of a chaotic society and humdrum of today's turbulent life, it is a relaxed state free of stress. He is one who observes the goings-on and play of samsara with a witness-like attitude or *shakshi-bhava*, taking the ups and downs, the peaks and troughs of the huge, never-ending roller-coaster with undistinguished equanimity. He is not perturbed, nor is he unduly excited.

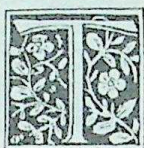
It is not that the pattern of the yogi's life stays unchanged. The external environment is always in a flux of change for him just as it is for all of us but the yogi remains undaunted and rarely influenced.

Just as in the laws pertaining to nature there are a few eclipses and occasional leap years, so too are minor disturbances and infiltration to a yogi's calm. All along, however, he is detached and free from the clutches of samsara. He is now beyond dukha.



# Power of Thoughts And Karmic Cycle

By Mukund



THE power of mind over matter is the creative power of thought. *Yad bhavam/ Tad bhavathi* — you become what you think. The world is a manifestation of our inner state. The situations we come across, the people we meet, the problems we confront, the life experiences we have, are all projections of what lie within. We create our reality. We are the architects of our destiny. Perceived reality eventually becomes manifested reality. So you become what you think; you find what you perceive.

Thought has immense power: It can create. Every time we perceive or harbour a thought containing a charge or emotion, the process of creation is set into motion; an arrow has been released into the ethereal planes, or the 'thoughtsphere'. Once released, similar thoughts or arrows bundle together and when the threshold is reached, the "law of reciprocal action" is set in motion.

The thought you released has now materialised into deed. If the arrow you released was judgment, you will come across judgmental people. If it was betrayal, you shall be betrayed; if it was hatred, you will be hated and so on. You have created your reality and no one is to be blamed for this. The world is reflecting your inner thoughts and feelings. You cannot be one thing inside and experience another reality outside. The two have to exist in synchronicity.

When we ask, "Why did this happen to me?" we do not perceive the relationship between thought and deed. Perhaps it is difficult because of the time lapse between the two. From thought to deed, it may take a week, a month, a year, a decade or more. Constant review of our lives will help us see the connection. The speed of reciprocation depends upon the evolution of the individual.

Sometimes reaching the threshold point could take a lifetime or more. If we do not find answers even after examining our lives in the light of these cosmic principles, only the theory of reincarnation can explain the rest.

The whole process of thought materialising into deed is a karmic cycle. So our life is a series of karmic cycles. An awareness of these eternal laws gives us the power to alter the course of karma but not while in the midst of a karmic cycle. We have the power of wisdom and choice of free will to review and



make changes to our life but not before the cycle comes to an end. A frog in mid-air cannot alter the course of its flight. However, on landing, it can choose the direction of its next leap. For true transformation we have to discover love, for which we need divine assistance.

Karma can be classified as that pertaining to the individual, family, nation and all of humanity. When we ask: "Why is the world so bad?" the world we see is a manifestation of our negative thoughts and emotions.

Our negative charges not only manifest as a painful situation in our life but create a negative occurrence elsewhere in the world. Every time we see, hear or read violence, we create violence somewhere. Every individual, irrespective of his nationality, is responsible for the kind of world we live in. The violent world we see is an example of the collective karma of mankind. So individual transformation can mean global transformation.

Karma is a cosmic principle and God is cosmic intelligence. Karma is independent of God. If God were to judge man's thought and action, then we are talking of reward and punishment.

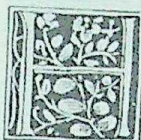
But Hinduism neither accepts a punishing God, nor talks about sin. To the Hindu, every situation is a consequence of one's own action and God helps us in our endeavours — spiritual and material.

The author is member, Golden Age Movement, Bangalore



# Mind, Body, Spirit: Strike a Balance

By Ashutoshji Maharaj



HEALTH is a key factor in the human evolutionary process. Health is not just physical fitness or absence of disease. In ancient India, the term health had a much wider connotation; it was something that went beyond physical and mental dimensions. The spiritual dimension reinforces and also uplifts the physical and mental dimensions of health. We are unique; God has endowed us with peerless organic capacity to comprehend not only the outer physical world of objects but also His divinity that is innate in us. Human fulfilment and well-being in real terms requires us to go beyond physical, mental and emotional dimensions of health. Having bestowed on man a privileged position vis-a-vis other creatures, God obviously expects man to do what others cannot do.

But, as the philosopher Spinoza said, men ignore health and the love of the eternal and infinite and deem riches, fame and sensual pleasures as the highest good. When Yudhishtira was asked by the Yaksha in the *Mahabharata* the highest gain in human life, the prince declared that it was sound health. Today's materialistic view of life is a huge departure from this approach. While sense gratification is invariably followed by repentance, the hunger for fame and riches is never satiated. The love of fame compels us to order our lives by the opinion of others. Diseases of body and mind are fallouts of this. The *Manu Smriti* says that desire is never satisfied by the enjoyment of objects of desire; it grows more and more as does the fire to which fuel is added.

We need to be healthy not only at the physical and mental level but also at the spiritual level. Attainment of God is the foremost duty enjoined upon human beings. Every other work we undertake is for satiation of senses. Worldly obligations are indeed to be performed, but with detached attachment. We need to learn to exercise inward detachment. Let us dedicate all our actions to God and never nurture the feeling of being the doer. The physical body is, thus, essential both for the attainment of God and for undertaking mundane duties. Efficient and effective worldly life calls for a sound and disease-free body.

Mental health is no less important. But, a person cannot be said to be mentally healthy if he continues to be afflicted with the five vices — lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego. It is a matter of common experience that we do a lot to cure physical



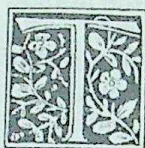
ailments but precious little to cure mental maladies. Mental afflictions constantly torment the soul and are even responsible for physical ailments. This leads to serious malfunctioning of body and mind. For balanced development, it is essential that body and mind work in tandem with each other. So, a sound body, mind and spirit help human beings attain the zenith of perfection. It calls for spiritual illumination, which starts with a trans-dichotomous experience of cosmic vision. Scriptures say, without *atma bodh*, physical and mental health are of no consequence. Bereft of *atma gyan*, even an otherwise healthy person is likely to indulge in negative tendencies.

Scriptures speak of the body as being the living temple of God. Sages have stressed on healthy body and mind for attaining the state of eternal bliss. Just as one cannot cross a river in a leaky boat, even so without healthy body and mind we cannot cross the ocean of life. Vivekananda said: "People with emaciated bodies and long faces are the subjects for the physician; they are not yogis." Thus, the acme of human perfection can be attained only with an ideal mix of physical, mental and spiritual health.



# Supreme Union of Body, Mind, Soul

By Bibhansu Maiti



THE Sanskrit word *yoga* is derived from the root verb *yuj*, which means union. The supreme union of individual mind and cosmic mind is yoga. In his *Yogasutras*, Patanjali advocated the eight-fold path of *astanga yoga*. Its eight limbs are: *yama* (self-restraint), *niyama* (life-regulating moral rules and observances), *asana* (postures of bodily restfulness), *pranayama* (breath control), *pratyahar* (withdrawal of senses), *dharana* (fixing the mind on the Supreme), *dhyana* (absorption of self), and *samadhi* (liberation of the soul).

These eight branches are closely related to every aspect of human life. Contrary to popular perception, *asana* is only one aspect of yoga; it can never represent yoga comprehensively. In its entirety, yoga is a well-knit, disciplined science of attaining supreme bliss.

Yoga categorises human life into three strata — physical, psychic and spiritual. Our body, which forms the physical stratum, is composed of nerves, flesh, blood and bone, and trillions of cells. This biological machine is attuned to a strict natural discipline. To maintain it in harmony, regular practice of yoga's *asanas* and *pranayam*, along with a yogic diet, is a must.

The mind forms the second stratum of the self. In our existence, expression, expansion and attainment, the mind plays a key role. It is never empty, and we know from experience that it never stands still. It always runs in various directions with myriad desires. Strict observance of *yama* and *niyama*, a true vision of life and regular practice of *ishvara pranidhan* (meditation) can not only enrich our lives but eliminate all kinds of mental distresses.

The ultimate stratum is the spiritual one, extremely important in yoga that has realisation of the self as its main motto. Self-realisation is to find the answer to the question 'Who am I?' and merge one's 'I-ness' into cosmic consciousness. Yoga culminates in *samadhi*, which is the *dharma* or nature of every mind. Now, what is *dharma*?

*Dharma* and religion are not synonymous. God is one; He can never be classified. To know Him, to be one with Him in a wise, refined way is the goal of yoga. Yoga is then an art of attainment. Religion, on the other hand, is prayers and performances, customs and rituals, doctrines and dogmas



framed by a section of society. Hence the English word 'religion' can never replace the Sanskrit word 'dharma'.

Dharma is the characteristic of an entity. For example, sugar is sweet, hence sweetness is the dharma of sugar. So the characteristic which an entity holds or the nature by which it is identified is called dharma. What is the dharma of the human mind? According to Patanjali, it is *sarva-bhaumachitta*.

What is the best way to achieve it? It is said that the origin of the universe is *ananda*, it is constantly evolving in *ananda*, our very substance is *ananda*. The Supreme Being is pure bliss, *sacchidananda*. One can quench one's thirst for happiness by realising the supreme entity within oneself. To adhere to this search is the dharma of every being; the dharma of *sarva-bhaumachitta* is *manava dharma*. This is what yoga stands for.

There is no difference between one human being and another. The physical structure, the complexion or the mental make up may vary from man to man, country to country, but the basic biological formation, the fundamental physique and psyche, is similar in all. Feelings of love, patience, pain and pleasure, sorrow and agony, are equally felt and expressed by all. This is why religions are many, but dharma is one. We are approaching a global economy and culture. Let dharma be globalised too, in the form of its most practical science — yoga.



# Nirvana is Within Reach of Everyone

By Kailash Vajpeyi



CURRENTLY we have a vast range of beliefs about the world around us. Having a belief involves having ideas. Ideas create imagination and desire. All desires are not meant to be fulfilled. Unfulfilled desire generates pain. Pain is the root cause of misery according to almost all systems of thought including Buddhism. Salvation, *moksha*, *kaivalya* or *nirvana*, is the goal of each one of these systems. However, nirvana (or *nibbana* in Pali), which is the summum bonum of Buddhism, needs a little deeper enquiry. *Ni* is an article that represents negation, and *vana* in Sanskrit means craving. *Vanan vucchati tanha*: Extinction of *vana* is called nirvana.

According to Buddhist cosmology, the universe is divided into three planes. First, there is the sensual, second, the corporeal, and finally, there is a subtle and more refined sphere known as the incorporeal (*arupa*) plane. One is required to transcend all these planes with the help of meditation.

There are a number of ifs and buts with regard to meditation. First, the meditation must be co-ordinated to the proper following of the Buddhist way as indicated in *Samyutta nikaya*. Second, the meditation must lead to a proper awareness of all *Arya Sattvas* i.e. misery, old age, death etc. Third, nirvana which is transcendental in nature involves the cutting off of rebirth, and therefore cannot simply be defined through one's meditative experience.

Now the question is how meditation is linked to the three planes mentioned earlier. By sitting alone in the early stages, the adept rises beyond the sensual plane. From the sensual plane the adept gradually leaves behind *kamechha* or lust. Here the gender difference vanishes. The five senses also get blurred.

The world looks like an impressionistic painting. Now one can find a difference between the sensual plane and the pure corporeal frame. The next two stages are the properties of the datumless incorporeal plane. Finally, going beyond cognition and non-cognition the adept reaches a state of total void.

According to Buddhist metaphysics, nirvana is attainable even in this lifetime because Buddhahood is the destiny of everyone. When nirvana is realised even when the body is alive it is called *sopadisheshha nirvana*. When a *Bhikshu* attains *parinirvana* after the extinction of material frame (body) without any remainder of physical existence, it is called



*anupadishesha parinirvana.*

In order to clarify the state of nirvana, it can be said that just as fire is not stored up in any specific place and yet it exists, so is the case with nirvana. It can be achieved if the necessary conditions are fulfilled. Lord Buddha in the *Rohitassa Sutta* says:

"In this very one fathomless long body, along with its sensuality, thoughts and perceptions I do proclaim the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and path leading to the cessation of the world. Here world means suffering. The cessation of the world means the cessation of suffering which is nirvana."

Unlike other schools of thought which mention Bahisht, Baikuntha etc, nirvana is not a sort of heaven where a transcendental ego still remains. Nirvana is total annihilation. Since Buddhism denies the immortality of the soul and believes in *anatta* which is opposite of *satta*, it is needless to say that any sense of 'I' remains in the state nirvana.

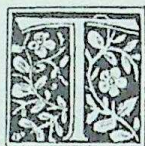
In the *Alagaddupama Sutta* Buddha asks: "What do you think O monks! Is this body permanent or impermanent? Is it befitting to consider that which is impermanent, painful and liable to change as 'This is mine, I am this, This is myself?' "

Therefore the body past, present and future, internal or external, gross or subtle, low or high, near or far — should be looked upon as "This is not mine". I am not this, and so are these sensations, aggregates and perceptions not mine. As one turns away from these perceptions, one is released and gets closer to nirvana.



# Get Rid of Desires, Realise Your Self

By Asaramji Bapu



O see people fighting over religion is disheartening. Every culture, every religion, every person has a right to find the Divine Enlightenment in its own way. Where is the need to prove that only one path is right? Be it a Christian or a Hindu or a Mohammedan or a Buddhist or anyone, the *jeevatma* (soul) searches for the *paramatma* (Supreme Soul) and till then the cycle of births continues. Everyone is free to approach the Supreme Soul in his or her way.

If the entire world adopts Hinduism or Christianity or Islam, will this fight over the supremacy of religion stop? Perhaps not. The fights take place because *shraddha* in the Infinite One is lacking. This world is nothing but *maya*, an illusion that is just like the motion picture on the movie screen. Will you fight over the happenings on the cinema screen? All of us are striving to find eternal peace that can be achieved only through union with the Infinite One. Once you acknowledge this you will evolve spiritually.

Man must communicate consciously with the Cosmic One to get rid of desires. Only then will peace prevail, strength multiply and fear vanish. Sensual pleasures weaken the mind. Those who claim the world to be their own find nothing but heartache. The spiritual journey seems tough. Yet, sage after sage has attained direct personal experience of God on a metaphysical level and has demonstrated the superiority of mind over body, of soul over mind.

The mind is gullible and impressionable. It keeps reverting to its *samskaras*. To do so it behaves more shamelessly than a child. That is why the insistence on a strong and *saatvic* mind. To make a mind strong and *saatvic* our rishis and munis charted out certain disciplines like getting up at *brahmamuhurta*, following *brahmcharya* till marriage, leading a *saatvic* life, attending *satsangas*, meditation etc.

A weak mind is vulnerable and open to blackmail. If left uncontrolled your desires gradually get the better of you and once you are addicted to them they make you dance to their tunes.

Our scriptures have mentioned the right way of governing. Lord Rama placed his subjects before his family. He had no life of his own. But today's leader places his kith and kin before his subjects and loses their respect. Following in their footsteps, the



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people too shirk from their responsibilities, and the result is that everyone is aware of their rights but not of their duties.

According to our scriptures, *rajniti* or the craft of politics must be guided by dharma or a value system. So, a leader should always consult a saint on how to look after his kingdom, how to make his subjects live in harmony.

Once a king went to a saint and bowed at his feet. The saint smiled and asked, "Can you give me your entire kingdom?" The king agreed happily and with full ceremony crowned the saint. The new king ordered the prince to be beaten up by the servants and the queens were made maidservants while the maids were made the queens. The old king was asked to take the place of adviser while the advisers were sent out among the public. The prisoners were asked to be sentries and the sentries were put in jail. Everything was upside down. Everyone protested to the previous king but he was helpless.

After a few days the saint called the king and handed over the crown saying, "Enough. Now you play with your toys and let me play with my God." When the king insisted on knowing why the saint had behaved as he did, the saint replied: "The prince was in the habit of beating his servants, your queens ill-treated the maids, the maids were jealous of the queens' easy lifestyle, the prisoners were living in hell because of the sentries, the advisers were not paying any heed to the public demands and you were expecting only praise from your advisers. So I made everyone step into each other's shoes. A king should always realise what each person in his kingdom is going through. God has given you this responsibility. Rule for the public not for yourself. Work selflessly, without expectation, without desires and let the Higher Power take care of the rewards."

As told to Seema Burman



# Service to Mankind Is Narayana Seva

By O P Sharma



WAMI Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission on May 1, 1897 in Calcutta. He named the organisation after his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, and all activities here are conducted in the light of his enlightened, universal teachings. Said Swamiji, before he established the spiritually oriented philanthropic body, "My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody and then let men and women settle their own fate." The Sage of Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna, preached harmony of religions, service of God in man, and perception of spiritual unity in diversity.

The Ramakrishna Mission's activities are multifarious — medical, educational, cultural, relief and rehabilitation work, plus others; and all these are carried out in the spirit of *Narayana Seva*, with a holistic spirit and attitude. This new kind of worship of Narayana in Nara involves "seeing God and serving him in all human beings, the living and moving temples of God". Particularly, this holistic service (or worship) is to be addressed to members of that awfully neglected section of our society — the poor and the underprivileged without regard to their caste, creed, race, religion or gender.

The tradition of Narayana seva in the Mission (Mahatma Gandhi called it *daridra Narayana seva*), had its beginning in the injunction of Sri Ramakrishna to Narendra (the pre-monastic name of Swami Vivekananda) not to indulge in charity out of mere pity for the poor, but to render appropriate service to them in a worshipful and uncondescending spirit and manner. Consequently, Swamiji also, in turn, called upon his followers to do the same, asking them pointedly: "Where shall ye go to seek for God? Are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak, gods? Why not worship them first? Why go to dig a well on the shores of the Ganga?"

As anyone who is familiar with the life of Sri Ramakrishna will know, he had successfully practised each of the various major religions. He had not only practised the various faiths but he had gone on to attain the final unitary experience (in *nirvikalpa samadhi*) which is the culmination of all spiritual experience. After having gained Cosmic Consciousness attendant on the supreme realisation, he became, as the shastras say, *samadrishtha* or same-sighted towards all. Consequent upon



his perception of the divine ground common to the whole creation of the spiritual unity that informs the plethora of diversity (including the diversity of faiths), the master confidently declared, "As many faiths, so many valid paths to God realisation". In other words one can realise the Supreme Being or attain perfection by following any religious path with sincerity. All religions are true, being variously suited to the different tastes, temperaments and capacities of their respective followers", he averred. "Each path is a valid one and quite capable of taking a person to the highest goal. The only thing wrong is to believe that one's own religion or path is the only true one and all others false".

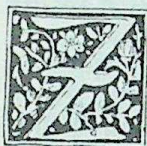
This enlightened and universal approach to religion which is unifying and not divisive and which stems from lofty mystic realisation and not just academic study or dissertation has been hailed by the distinguished British historian, Sir Arnold Toynbee, as "unique in India".

The Sage of Dakshineswar's aforesaid approach to religion is faithfully reflected in all the activities of the body named after him. When translated into practical terms Swami Vivekananda called it Practical Vedanta — of social or community service his unprecedentedly broad and liberal vision animates all its activities as all paths lead to the same great goal. Swami Vivekananda's zeal for spiritual humanism is reflected in the motto he bestowed upon the organisation: *atmano mokshartham jagadhitaya cha* — "For one's own liberation and the good of the world."



# The Perfect Mind Shines Forever

By Kailash Vajpeyi



ZEN is Japanese for the Sanskrit *dhyana*, the inner art and design of self-searching through meditation. In modern times it has become so popular that it is slowly becoming a cliché. Nowhere is the paradox in Zen better illustrated than in the teachings of Chinese monk Huang Po, who provided an entire new meaning to the word Zen. He lived below the Vulture Peak and delivered lectures to a handful of people in such a fashion that most of his students thought of him as not a very kind-hearted man. In the history of Buddhism, Huang Po is remembered for his non-Zen Buddhism.

According to him 'meditation' is a misleading word. If 'objectlessness' is the goal of meditation then it may well be taken to lead to a sleepless trance, which is not the aim of Zen. If we shut out the phenomenal world by closing our eyes, we only indulge in self-delusion. In non-Zen Buddhism we try to reach the point where all variations and distinctions are seen to be void and where everything looks to be either desirable or undesirable.

"Enlightenment", says Huang Po, "comes in a flash". There is no such thing as gradual or partial enlightenment. When the water is boiling, we do not say it is partially boiling and also no qualitative change occurs during the period when it gets hotter and hotter.

A number of Buddhists have labelled the doctrine of Huang Po as an anti-thesis of Buddhism. In fact, it is believed that more people achieve a sudden flash of enlightenment, than Zen adepts. For example, in India, Lord Chaitanya, Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Guru Nanak achieved enlightenment in a fraction of a second.

In the Vulture Valley, Huang Po often told his students that the mind is like the void in which there is no confusion or evil. This mind is not a mind of conceptual thought and it is completely detached from form. The mind is like the sun. It emits its glorious light totally uncontaminated by the finest particles of dust. The phenomena of light and dark alternate with each other, but the nature of the void remains the same. Similarly, for people who have realised the nature of reality, there is nothing new or old. 'Depth' and 'shallowness' are meaningless words.

The cosmos can reveal its mystery to any sentient being. So



Buddhas and sentient beings are not different from each other. If you can only rid yourself of conceptual thought, you will have accomplished everything. What invariably happens to most of us is that we indulge in conceptual thought based on text or environmental phenomenon, hence we are either obsessed with the idea of achieving an extraordinary state of mind or we are busy condemning ourselves.

What Huang Po suggests is to eliminate environmental phenomena and put an end to our conceptual thinking. When this ceases the void emerges. As a matter of fact the void already exists. It is only clouded by our aspirations and anxiety. Thus all things are naught, but the intangible mind.

"The way the world is," says a follower of Huang Po, "it couldn't be any other way. It is neither 'well' nor 'not well', it simply is." So stop trying to change others, first of all clean your own muck. The pure mind shines forever and on with the brilliance of its own perfection. But the people of the world are not awake to it, regarding only that which "sees, hears, feels and knows" as the mind. Blinded by their own sight, hearing and touch they do not perceive the spiritual brilliance of the source substance. If they would eliminate all conceptual thought in a flash, that source substance would manifest itself like the sun ascending through the void, illuminating all objects without hindrance.

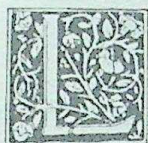
Normally, people think that the Buddhas transmit the doctrine of the mind, and that there is something to be attained, apart from the mind; and thereupon they use the mind to seek dharma, not knowing that the mind cannot be used to seek something, which is already there behind the mind — the void.

Many people are afraid to empty their own minds lest they plunge into the void. They do not know that their own mind is the void. The void is eternal. It existed when there was no "before". It will survive even after, when survival ceases to exist. "If you try to define void," says Huang Po, "you are contaminating it." Therefore, refrain from giving it any terms of reference. You will find there is no difference between sentient beings and Buddhas, between samsara and nirvana, between delusion and Bodhi." When all such forms are abandoned there is the Buddha or enlightenment.



# Avatars Help Bond With the Divine

By Sri Sri Ravishankar



IFE is incomplete without union with God. It is quite natural that a matured mind and a receptive heart strives for this union. Since long, philosophies were born, debates happened, music, art and literature evolved from this very need. Religions, philosophies, practices, customs and austerities have all pointed to one thing — union with the Divine.

On an average, the person who wakes up to the suffering in his life wants to be free from it. For this, he looks to the super power of creation. The more he looks at the misery and shortcomings in his life, the farther away he feels from the Divinity which is his very nature. His heart yearns to establish contact with the Supreme.

Since ages, man has been striving to reduce the gap between himself and God. There are two ways to do this: One way is to elevate humankind towards Divinity — this is called Siddha, and the person who achieves this state is believed to have attained perfection. The second way is to bring God to human level in avatar form. Here, Divinity manifests itself for the sake of humankind. So man rising up to God is Siddha; God coming down, because he cares for you, and wants to communicate directly with you, is avatar.

Avatar is God in human form, and in that humanness, you can get a glimpse of Divinity. In the Puranas, all the devas are depicted with human emotions and tendencies. They experience 'normal' feelings of anger, love and resentment. Rama and Krishna went through a gamut of human experience in order to make us realise that God need not be a distant concept; God can be one among us. So don't look for the superhuman in an avatar as the concept is for the Supreme Being to come as close to humans as possible — as one among them, as an avatar.

The concept of avatar is common in the east in countries like India, China, Japan, Korea and Nepal. *Nripo Narayano Hari* — the king is regarded as the avatar of Vishnu. *Vaidhyo Narayano Hari* — the doctor, too, is venerated as Vishnu-avatar. In the West, however, the Divine Messenger aids spiritual evolution. In the East, there is greater intimacy between humans and God. Hence the avatar is like a mother going personally to her child — there is greater emotional bonding.

Spiritual evolution through heartfelt, personal devotion is typically eastern whereas the western perspective is based on



the concept of a messenger and hence is necessarily more formal. The *bhaktas* and Sufis were more comfortable with the idea of avatar. For an intimate relationship, God comes directly. Your love for God becomes authentic when you are assured of his love for you. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, it is Krishna who first tells Arjuna: "You are dear to me", which enabled Arjuna to surrender. Wherever you feel immense respect, wherever you get a glimpse of Divinity, know that it is avatar. Avatar lies in those who recognise — and entire creation comes alive as Divinity. This is the stage before the awareness of "I Am".

The entire phenomenon of creation is the descent of consciousness in various names and forms. The whole purpose of avatar is to make you realise that you are part of Him. Avatar is not there to charm you but to calm you; to make you return home. And to make you realise you are that. Once you recognise the avatar, suddenly, entire creation is filled with 'that' and you are that. The descent of God is to make you realise that there is neither up nor down. There is no high or low, ascension or descent. There is no two.



# Find the Oneness Beyond Duality

By Sudarshan Dheer



T is very easy to advise others. Only the one who suffers knows the extent of the pain. At the same time there is no difference between one person's pain and another's, whether that person is rich or poor. No philosophy, sermon or concept will help relieve that suffering immediately. It is useful, however, to remember that at the core of any pain-causing conflict there is duality. We are part of a cycle that contains both pain and pleasure, creating a split between mind and body, delaying the healing process.

Duality is all-pervasive; it is present in everything around us. Even that oft-quoted line from Shakespeare reflects this: "To be or not to be." Every one of our daily actions is preceded by a struggle — to come to a decision on this or that, pain or pleasure, day or night, north or south pole, hot or cold, left or right... all through life we keep on playing this game of duality.

Duality is our own creation. We describe breathing as something that involves inhalation and exhalation but in reality there is only one breath. As long as we continue to split things, conflict is bound to be present. And conflict breeds fear, tension, stress and war. But as long as we live on this planet, this split will remain; there is no escaping it.

In reality, however, there is no duality. There is only an all-pervasive Oneness. There is no day and night, since the sun never sets. There is no beginning and no end, no birth and no death. In that space there is total silence. This silence emanates not from the mind but from the very depth of the heart wherein only one thing remains, that is love emerging from the very source — *atman*, the consciousness which exists in every being. We are all part of that same cosmic force. Despite being a part of it, every one of us is as complete as the whole universe.

Let's explore and find out the truth about reality, what is finite and what is infinite. Holistically speaking anything we experience with our senses has a definite end. The body will die but the soul or *atman* is eternal, it never dies. It is only in the stillness of deep silence that thoughts are not active, they get dissolved. Those are the moments when body and mind are one and duality is absent. The silence of meditation or yoga dissolves the senses and the mind transcends to a higher level of consciousness. There emerges immense energy and compassion — the moment of creativity when you become one with nature.



Nature has bestowed on us abundant power or *atmashakti* to overcome any amount of pain. We seldom leave the task of alleviating pain to nature; rather, we want instant solutions. But pain and suffering give us the opportunity to look within and experience that oneness or wholeness where no duality is present. In this context, *tantra* believes in oneness and wholeness. According to *tantra* there is no duality; duality is nothing but an illusion or *maya*. In *tantra* there is no split. It is merely acceptance of reality.

The child's mind, however, is in a non-dual state. The child's personality is as yet whole — the split is eventually imposed by the adults around the child and the society in which the child lives. Ultimately when he grows up, he is not the real one or the real self. In order to get back one's real self one has to go inward where there is no past, no future, but there is only the present. In this state of meditation, one may get in touch with our inner being, the non-dual state. Once this insight is gained, one is awakened. This is *nirvana* or enlightenment, where there is no duality; there is only completeness.

The attainment of *nirvana* does not mean that the person will not grow old, fall sick or die or that he is above pain. What *nirvana* does promise is an inner heaven which enables one to live with pain and to take possession of it, and experience a profound peace of mind in the midst of suffering. *Nirvana*, therefore, is in the very heart of each and every person's being.



# Be Aware of Thought, Word and Action

By Mata Amritanandamayi



WARENESS arises when knowledge accompanies action. Mere acquisition of knowledge does not mean that such knowledge will translate into action. For instance, most of us know that if you smoke cigarettes, you are susceptible to cancer. We acquire knowledge, but we lack awareness.

Cigarette smokers see the statutory warning imprinted on the cigarette packs: "Smoking is injurious to health." Nevertheless, they continue to smoke. But if one day, the smoker does begin to suffer from ill-health on account of his smoking, then, the knowledge turns into awareness — through direct experience — that smoking could indeed be injurious to health. It is either because we lack this awareness or we are unable to translate awareness to action that we commit mistakes.

We should enjoy freedom and be enthusiastic every moment of our lives. Our lives should become a joyous celebration. But normally, you will only hear tales of sorrow. Attachment leads to sorrow. One of the best ways to attain material prosperity, spiritual progress, peace and liberation is through meditation.

Meditation is not just sitting motionless in perfect posture with closed eyes. Maintaining awareness of our actions, words and thoughts is real meditation. Our thoughts are like countless water droplets that form a river of words and actions. We have little control over this river. It is so strong that it can even wash away huge boulders that lie in its path. However, it is easy to block or change the direction of a river's flow at its source with just a stone. Therefore, we must be careful with our thoughts.

If there is a defect in a mould, everything that is made from that mould will be defective. In the same way, unless we first purify our minds, our words and actions will not be pure. Therefore, the first thing we have to do is to control our minds through meditation. And through discriminate actions we can become successful in life.

The root cause of our problems is the ego, but the ego does not have any objective existence. Only humility can help us get rid of our ego. When one says or thinks, "I am the master", one is, in fact, becoming a slave to the ego. The greatest obstacles to enjoying life are this kind of an attitude and self-centred thoughts. Because of this, we are unable to serve others.

Bharat (India) is the land of rishis (seers). They have handed down to us a timeless culture that stands for the welfare and



uplift of the whole world. Our ancestors advised us, "*Matrudevo bhava* — regard mother as God, *Pitrudevo bhava* — regard father as God, *Acharyadevo bhava* — regard preceptor as God and *Atithidevo bhava* — regard your guest as God".

The underlying love is the important link that unites society. Today, that link is weak. More and more individuals are isolating themselves from one another. We need to shower love on our children and enhance their awareness at the same time. A plant in a dark room will grow in the direction of sunlight. Likewise, children yearn for love, acceptance and attention. We should revive the love that upholds family life, social life and nature. Bonding between family members, young and old, student and teacher and between members of society is important to help us reach out to one another, strengthening our links with one another.

Today, stress is common in every sphere of life. This is mainly because we are obsessed with our own selves — we are driven by our ego. Freedom from tension is possible only through surrender to God. He guides us from within. But we do not have the patience to pay attention to that divine voice. Because of this, we keep repeating our mistakes; we experience sorrow.

Arjuna and Krishna grew up together. Yet Krishna did not impart the *Gita* to Arjuna during that time but waited for that moment when Arjuna awakened the disciple within him. To be a disciple is to surrender. Then everything in the cosmos becomes our guru. Every experience becomes our guru. But no amount of experience can help us realise our mistakes unless we cultivate and adopt the humility required to be able to surrender our selves.



# Save Your Spirit From Technology

By Kailash Vajpeyi



IRRITATED by a mystic saint's popularity, a scholar decided to find out the source of his system. The mystic lived on a mountain top. With great difficulty the scholar climbed the mountain and posed his question to the master. The master handed the academic a delicious peach. When it had been eaten by the scholar, the master asked if he would like another. The scholar ate the second peach. Then the philosopher asked: "Are you interested to know where this peach was grown?" "No," said the scholar. "That is the answer to your question about my system," said the master.

Few people try to explore the frontiers of their consciousness. Their pleasure-seeking passion never permits them to sit quietly, wrote Soren Kierkegaard who revolted against the traditional religiosity of man. Agreeing with him, William James, the father of paranormal psychology, opined that religion was like a thin verbal oil slick floating atop the deep ocean of mysticism.

Mysticism is the purest form of psyche where the consciousness is not even aware of its existence. It is a non-physical connectivity with the superior cosmic intelligence. It is a flight of 'alone to the alone'. The most beautiful experience we can have is that of the mysterious. Unfortunately, today, luring us with material benefits, technology has ousted transcendence and mysticism from our lives. We are edging towards spiritual bankruptcy. Since mysticism is a kind of spontaneous revelation, it is always solo. That's why mystics tend to be treated as 'outsiders'. Mystics also never make an effort to organise themselves — they don't release a manifesto for the media, for instance. Theirs is a silent revolution, the transformation taking place only in an individual soul. This can never be achieved by proxy.

Daily events are often interpreted on the basis of the 'cause and effect' theory. However, when we come across a mystic we find some inexplicable law is at work, which has nothing to do with the theories or teachings we have evolved for the smooth functioning of our 'civilised' society.

What is mysticism: Is it a call of the beyond, a message from nowhere or just a state of 'no-mind' which defies definition? Maybe it's a free zone which has nothing to do with the codified religions of the world. Take for instance the story of



Ramakrishna Paramhansa, a unique mystic of modern times. He had been asked to conduct the worship of Mother Kali regularly. His method of worship was unique. Everyday, taking flowers and bel leaves in his hand, he would touch his own head, chest — in fact the whole body including the feet — and then offer them at the feet of the Kali. At other times, with eyes and chest flushed, he would move like a drunkard, with tottering steps from his seat to the throne of the goddess, touch her chin as a sign of endearment and begin to sing, talk or even dance. Similarly, Lalleshwari, the renowned Kashmiri poetess became a wandering recluse, living in caves, going about in utter disregard of personal appearance in a semi-nude state.

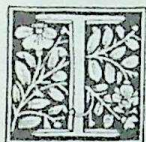
There are a number of such God-intoxicated people like Sufi-saint Sarmad, poet Kabir, Andal and Mira Bai who were more or less outsiders in a routine oriented society. This syndrome is the source of an abundant symbolism. Mysticism is the strength of primordial psychology. We could call it ontology, the science of self. It is a science and journey of human becoming from being.

Technology is still a toddler; yet, it claims, a-morphically, that finally, it will surpass cosmic laws. Technology is slowly devouring spirituality. It has destroyed transcendence from our reality-map without being concerned about the existence of a higher reality which is soundless, touchless, formless and imperishable — which is without beginning and without end.



# Kama as Means To Moksha

By K M Gupta



IN Indian philosophy, *kama* or sexual desire has been accorded an important place. There are four kinds of *purushartha*, ends of life, and one of them is *kama*. This is because the world was born out of *kama*. We know that all beings are born out of *kama*. What we don't know is that the cosmos itself is a product of *kama*. How was the world born?

In the very beginning, according to the Upanishads, was *sah akamayata*. There was the 'worldstuff' or *sad vastu* in the beginning, and it was seized with *kama*. It agitated in *kama* and desired expansion. At the height of this agitation, there was *bindu visphota*.

The word *bindu* means both a point and semen. When the guru advises his disciples to keep to celibacy, he says: "Falling of *bindu* is death; keeping of *bindu* is life." *Visphota* means bursting out. Therefore *bindu visphota* denotes the orgasm. The world was born out of *bindu visphota*. One can think of this *bindu visphota* as what modern scientists speak of as the 'Big Bang' that generated the universe. The Big Bang is the orgasm of *kama* in the worldstuff.

*Bindu* is also known variously as *teja*, *prana*, *kam* and *vaishwanara*. It is the *bindu's kam* (energy) that becomes *kham* (space). From this energy was born matter in the form of *panchabhutas*. The *panchabhutas* are mostly misunderstood. As Vedanta explains it, the *panchabhutas* include the solid *prithvi*, the liquid *apa*, the gaseous *vayu*, the energy within matter, *agni*, and the amount of space an object takes up for its shape, called *akasha*. This way, the world was born out of *kama*.

Since energy is *kama*, the universe is imbued with *kama*. Matter in all its states and diversity is *kama*, and the space that houses matter is also an expanse of *kama*. *Kama* is the substance of the universe. That is why *kama* is such a force in the life of beings. There is no beating it.

In the *Mahabharata*, Kamadeva, the God of *kama* and love, brags: "If anyone tries to beat me, I grow manifold over his beating." The attempt to subdue or win *kama* only makes it burst out with greater force.

Since *kama* is the origin and quiddity of existence, it has to be accorded its rightful place. Therefore *kama* has been included as one of the *purusharthas*. The ultimate *purushartha* is *moksha* — liberation of the soul from the clutches of finite existence.



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Generally, kama is regarded as an obstacle to moksha and *brahmacharya* while celibacy is seen as an essential pre-requisite on the road to moksha. The guru commands, keep the bindu, don't let it fall. The reason given as to why kama has to be overcome for the attainment of moksha is that kama is the opening up of cosmic energy while moksha is its opposite — which is shutting energy in all its diversity up in its primordial cause, the worldstuff or sad vastu. So they are deemed natural contraries.

However, anything that belongs to this world can be turned into an instrument for moksha and kama is no exception. Kama also can be a means to moksha. But actually doing this needs extraordinary skill. Some sects of *tantra* use kama as an instrument of moksha. For these, kama is more spiritual and less carnal. Genuine practitioners of tantra achieve an experience of oneness with the Divine at the height of the physical orgasm. For them, kama is a great magnetic pull towards the divine and the orgasm is a perfect communion.

Kama as a means for moksha is extremely individualistic, slippery, esoteric and unreliable as far as lay practitioners are concerned, and therefore its use is not advisable for the general public. An example is Osho, who took this extremely individualistic practice to the public domain and became controversial.

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# In Search of The Real 'Me'

By Swami Chidananda



EY, I'm in Nirvana! We talk like this when we feel good. But what is it like to actually attain *nirvana*, otherwise known as *moksha* or self-realisation?

Self-realisation is the goal of life. Vedic rishis found that everything in the world that blooms is also subject to ultimate decay. Are we here just to live a brief life and then pass away? They reasoned that life cannot be devoid of some higher purpose.

After much investigation and contemplation and many generations later, sages declared that beneath this mortal body is an unseen immortal spirit — and that spirit is our real Self.

That eternal spirit in the non-eternal body; that imperishable in the perishable body is actually a part of a vast infinite, eternal, beginning-less, endless, cosmic spirit. It exists. But not as an inert piece. It is consciousness. It knows — I exist. So it is conscious existence. Existence is *sat*. Consciousness is *chit*. So it is *sat-chit*.

In this state of pure *sat-chit* consciousness, we are subjected to many imperfect experiences — heat and cold, pleasure and pain. All these disruptive mortal experiences cannot upset that lofty, sublime, transcendental realm of the real Self, for once the state of pure consciousness has been achieved, only peace and bliss abide. There is *ananda* in that *sat-chit*. So it is *sat-chit-ananda* or state of eternal existence. To realise and enter this state is called self-realisation.

Self-realisation is the goal of life because in that state there is pure and permanent bliss and joy. Isn't that the goal of each one of us? Of course, the mortal, perceivable world also has joy in it. But joy in our worldly life is neither pure nor permanent. If a thing is capable of giving pleasure, it is capable of giving pain, too. For instance, when a person marries, he or she does so in the hope of attaining to greater happiness and peace through raising a family and giving and receiving love.

However, life is a mix of both pleasure and pain — what gives us happiness can also give us pain. Pleasure and pain go together because the world is imperfect and man also is imperfect. Pleasure is the womb of pain. Seeking pleasure, you have already created pain.

For real and permanent happiness one needs to rise above petty desires and seek ultimate reality. There is supreme bliss and satisfaction there — an indescribable joy and peace. To



seek ultimate reality does not mean you cannot fulfil your worldly duties. Even while fulfilling your duties, be a seeker of truth.

Your mortal body is only a vehicle given to you to function on this earth. But you are distinct from it. You are an immortal part of divinity. Try to become one with that limitless ocean of sat-chit-ananda. I'm a little wave, but I'm also a part of the ocean.

There's no difference between the wave and the ocean. The wave may appear separate because it has size and form. But that is momentary; the wave goes back into the ocean. The wave arises from the ocean, exists for a moment, and then goes back to the ocean.

Someone asked me recently: How many self-realised people are there? That's impossible to say, I said. For, how can one make out if a person is realised — they don't have outward distinguishing marks! But he persisted, demanding an answer to his question — he wanted me to guess the figure. I told him that whatever the figure, I had little doubt that most of them are from India.

The author is president of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh



# You Are the Immortal Soul

By Harleen Kaur



Am I the body, or am I the soul? The body, I can understand, see, feel, smell, touch. But what is soul? How can I experience it?

According to Hindu philosophy, the real self of human beings is the soul. It is immortal, "made in the image of God" and is a non-participant in the game of life and the trials and tribulations that the body undergoes. The soul is called the *atma*, and the body is *jiva*. The *jiva* enacts the drama of life, and the *atma* is the spectator.

The *atma* is beyond body and thought and, as absolute consciousness, is identical with the *Para-Brahma*, the all-pervading Supreme Being. But while it is within the *jiva*, it is limited to the consciousness level of the body. The emancipation of the soul and its union with its higher self, the *param-atma*, can happen only when the limited consciousness of the body becomes liberated of its worldly bonds and attains the level of absolute consciousness of the soul. And that is what the search is all about.

According to Vedanta, the human soul is a part of *Para-Brahma*, a sort of microchip in the cosmic supercomputer. The soul becomes embroiled in the mental activity of the body, and is reborn again and again — until this circle is broken through realisation of clear awareness or consciousness. To put it simply, the soul has to travel with the baggage of a body, till it can remember to dump it.

Adi Sankara explains: "The Self is reflected only in a clear mind. The Self, as pure Awareness, has to be seen as being distinct from body and mind. When the Self gets confused with body and mind, it is overcome by mortal fears. The Self regains fearlessness by realising the Truth about Itself. Awareness does not need another instrument, like the mind, to be aware of Itself. The seeker who has realised the Self sees the entire universe as the Self."

The *Gita* emphasises the need for the guidance of a good spiritual guide, or master, to take you through to your salvation. Such a person can take your hand and lead you to an introduction of your true self and beyond.

One such person is the modern founder of pranic healing, Master Choa Kok Sui of the Philippines. His belief is that the easiest (that is a relative term) way to awaken oneself spiritually is by rendering selfless service to living beings.



And what better service, than to help alleviate people of their physical pain, and heal the bodies of diseases?

So, by becoming a regular practitioner of pranic healing, one sets out unknowingly, at first to tread the path of realising the soul. Of course, as one progresses, the thirst for spiritual knowledge increases. The Master has given a small mantra to meditate upon which one can use to constantly remind oneself of as being a soul and not the body:

'You are not the body  
You are not the mind  
Neither are you the thought  
Nor the emotions.  
You are the I Am  
You are the Soul  
You are immortal.'

One should use this as a prayer, or as a constant reminder to oneself, and after a period of time one will find that one's connection with the Divine has increased manifold and that one is set on a path of spirituality.

Shiva and Shakti are present in all human life. The Shiva energy is the atma's connection to the Para-Brahma (through the param-atma, naturally). The Shakti (or Parvati) is embodied within the body, as the sleeping *Kundalini* or potential energy.

Once the Kundalini shakti is properly awakened and then guided to meet its Shiva, and when the two meet, the body realises its soul.

Doing these yogic techniques might be difficult for everybody but the repetition of the prayer of the soul is not. For the body to realise the soul, it is also very important for body to practise the following: Loving kindness and non-injury, generosity and non-stealing, Moderation and non-overindulgence, industriousness and non-laziness, accurate perception and correct expression and non-falsehood.

As the Master says, "Every time you refrain from unwholesome action, the connection with your higher soul increases. But everytime you break the virtues, the connection becomes attenuated."



# Overcoming the Fear of Death

By Sanjna Sijkri



OR a long time to come, September 11 will be synonymous with the macabre reality of death. And yet, for the thousands who lost their lives in the tragedy, death was not even a distant possibility that tragic Tuesday morning.

Incidents like September 11 remind us, albeit shockingly, that despite all our so-called superhuman technological, scientific and industrial advancements, we are still puppets in an unfolding cosmic play. Haunting as the thought is, we are no less vulnerable than the smallest creature here on Earth.

What, then, does life and specifically death hold for us? Is there some finality about death? The answers to these and many other questions often come from embarking on a personal spiritual voyage.

For those in search of such answers, interesting perspectives can be gained from the writings of Eknath Easwaran. In his book, *The Undiscovered Country: Exploring the Promise of Death*, Easwaran explains that nothing in life is more important than the fact of death and nothing more urgent than learning how to overcome it in this life itself.

Easwaran talks of how "in the life of every spiritually aware person, the time comes when he or she questions whether death is inevitable". This is not an intellectual question as much as a spiritual one.

As individuals, we have a strange, inexplicable aversion towards death. We are always turning away from "life's last great change". We believe that we will never be called upon to act our roles out in the "theatre of death". This only complicates confrontation with the phenomenon when it finally occurs.

The secret to understanding the passage to the undiscovered country as Shakespeare termed death is to transcend death in our lives. Cruel as it sounds, we must remember that in the midst of life, we are in death. What you call salvation belongs to the time before death, as Kabir said.

In the process of learning about, understanding and finally accepting death, we learn to sacrifice our less important desires for the important one of searching for our eternal Self. We realise that we must rise above any *ahamkara*, above self-will and egotism. We must wake up from the dream of "self-centred separate existence we call living", Easwaran exhorts.

Paradoxically, it is in understanding death that we are able to



put our lives in perspective. It is in appreciating its true meaning that we would perhaps live life far more harmoniously and peacefully. A patient who had a near-death experience once said beautifully: "The knowledge that dying is spiritual leads not to a desire to die, but rather to a desire to live life more completely."

At a fundamental level then, we are as impermanent and transient as any other living creation. In *vipassana*, this is referred to as *anicca* and the Buddha rightly says suffering comes from a resistance to the understanding of *anicca*.

This understanding brings a certain perspective to our lives and the many relationships that we develop through our living years. It also allows for a certain emotional equanimity to be subsumed within an overall selflessness. What is ours today might not be there tomorrow.

At the physical level, death may appear a final change, or a halt, but in the larger scale of evolution, it becomes the passage for our thoughts, values and aspirations (*samskaras*) from this life into the next. These *samskaras* shape our destiny, our future incarnations. As the Buddha rightly said, work on what you can take with you.

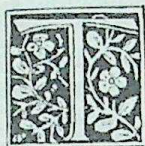
Life, therefore, at a more primary level, is about the way we wear our "jackets": The German philosopher, Meister Eckhart, talked of "going into your ground and learning to know oneself there". Similarly, Easwaran talks of the process of uncovering and in doing so, finding the many jackets or sheaths that we have, namely the *prana* (the vital sheath), the mind, the intellect and the ego. Meditation essentially is the process of ceasing to identify with the jackets, which are hiding the Self.

And lastly, we must remember that death does not diminish us. Living and dying are integral to any creative process and our lives are but an extension of this universal truth. Let us brace ourselves so that when death finally comes knocking, there is not a calamitous ring to it, but rather a spiritual passing into another realm.



# Incredible Journey To Immortality

By Kamlesh Dixit



THE enormity of death is felt by people when they lose someone close to them. Knowledge and spirituality are often the light at the end of the tunnel in such moments of sadness. A human being who has died, is like a torch extinguished. However, the flame of his life burns in his children, friends, work, and in his ideas. He has enriched the earth on which he has walked, the rivers in which he has bathed, and the living beings with whom he has been in communion. According to the Upanishads, death marks the end of a commerce with life, a transmission of all a person has received and the completion of a journey. What is important and what the world remembers is how well one has lived this journey.

Not every man attains immortality. Spiritual growth separates the immortal from the mortal. The *asu* or life-principle, the power of life or vital strength, is considered by some traditions to be *ahamkara*, the selfish ego of unfulfilled desires and unachieved projects. This ego is impure; it consists of unburnt *karmas*; it is afraid of death, because it must certainly die. There is, on the other hand, the personal *atman*, that spark of the *paramatman*, which does not die.

The *Katha Upanishad* enunciates the essence of death, the Great Departure or *Mahaprasthanam*. The temporal world is not everything, human life is not exhausted in space and time and the person is not totally dissolved into his constituent elements. In other words, there is another world. The other world is intimately connected with this world. Human life on earth conditions the other world. The last rites for the dead, blessings for their journey, and the climactic moment of death are important — they condition the new form of human existence and open the gates to the other world.

The Great Departure, according to the Upanishads, is not to another parallel, superior or inferior world — it is a departure from the human condition itself. We discard our spatio-temporal, corporeal trappings and move to the other 'shore', suggestive of the existence of another realm. *Brahmanirvana* has no shores. They are visible, as a mirage, only from this side.

The Upanishads do not place the other world outside this life. The difference between real, liberated life, and the unauthentic existence of the life of the senses or the body, is so radical



that the former could be immanent in the latter. The atman is so different from and so superior to the body that it does not rest on or depend upon the body — as is forcefully affirmed in expressions like 'the world is a great illusion'.

Death, therefore, is not seen as an end; it is a gate. *Samsara* is not the cosmos; it is the world in its dynamic and evolutionary aspect. It implies both change and continuity; it is a cyclical process of all the elements of this world. Together with the idea of karma, the notion of *samsara* suggests the contingency of all things, their inter-relationship, and the dynamic nature of all the elements of the empirical world.

The universality of death gives it a superhuman and quasi-divine status. Through death, immortality is achieved. Immortality is not deathlessness, the mere continuation of a given earthly and temporal condition; it is the overcoming of death, passing through it and reaching the other shore, a shore that can exist only because the river of death lies between it and life. Death is the very condition of authentic life; it is the door to the realm where man can fully be what he ultimately is.

As the *Bhagavad Gita* says: "Death is certain for all that is born/ and birth for all that dies/ therefore for what is unavoidable/ you should not be distressed."



# Finding Answers in The Mystic's Lab

By Mani Bhaumik



INCE the beginning, human beings have sought answers to spiritual questions, motivated by a basic urge to understand the meaning of life. Our search for answers has led us to believe in a divine being.

This belief in divine power dominated world thought until about 500 years ago when scientific discoveries and innovations began to shake our faith in God.

By the 19th century, Karl Marx, whose ideas would significantly influence the history of the following century, was dismissing religion as the opiate of the masses, and Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* discounted the Biblical story of creation. After Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation that God was dead, we seemed to sink into a slough of despair — and the despair sometimes bordered on panic since we were fearful that we had lost all sense of direction.

Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, urged people to regard God as an illusion, nothing more. He said our concept of God only symbolised an infantile desire for a father figure, and that we should outgrow this desire. Science should replace God, Freud decreed, explaining: "Science is not an illusion. An illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give we can get elsewhere."

But science also proved to be a false god, leaving many in despair, including, even, the atheistic philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who referred to the God-shaped hole in the human head through which God had been forcibly extracted.

In the 1960s, *Time* magazine ran a 'God Is Dead' cover story attributing the death of God to science and technology. Indeed, scientific knowledge that spawned technology has totally changed our lives by providing us material abundance and freeing us from drudgery.

But is knowledge everything? No. There is also love and the whole world of subjectivity, including spiritual experience. In terms of fulfilment, these are far more important than the knowledge science can give us. However, subjective experiences alone can mislead us — so a balance has to be maintained to overcome fear and superstition. Here, scientific knowledge can help us see things in a better perspective.

The truth is, both spirituality and science are essential to human beings, and always have been. Ironically, scientific



research that once questioned the existence of God, is also now providing evidence to strengthen our belief in a supreme power. Modern physics and cosmology are leading us to the conclusion that we are all an essential part of one single source from which creation itself sprang. Scientists call this source the 'unified field', with consciousness as its apparently inseparable aspect.

There are authentic, non-paranormal ways for us to experience our unity with the consciousness aspect of that source. Each path relies upon access through some type of meditation and prayer that has been established down the ages and in all cultures of the world. The emotional, spiritual, medical, and material advantages of drawing from both science and spirituality are enormous.

Experiencing our oneness with the source of everything, which we call God, evinces a bliss that has been described by so many in similar terms and in such different times and places that even professed agnostics like Jawaharlal Nehru conceded that there had to be some element of truth in it.

Happiness appears to be elusive. But when we are in tune with the consciousness aspect of the universal field, our window of perception is clearer. By tuning ourselves to the source, we perceive a truer picture of reality, just as a clear image emerges when a TV set is properly tuned to the transmitting field. Our full understanding of the spiritual implications of modern science and cosmology can make a profound contribution to human civilisation and spawn a new age of peace, prosperity, and contentment.



# Tree of Knowledge Can Liberate You

By K L Sharma



IDDHARTHA Gautam roamed in search of the secret of sorrow and suffering.

At Gaya, a village on the banks of the river Niranjana in Bihar, he sat in silent contemplation under a banyan tree. He attained enlightenment there, and became known as the Buddha. The spot began to be referred to as the Throne of Wisdom, and the banyan tree is now known as the Eternal Wisdom Tree, the *Akshaya Bodhibriksha*.

The tree stands for inexhaustible life, and is therefore a symbol of immortality. With its roots underground and branches rising to the sky, it symbolises heavenward ascension. The branches that hang down to take root in the ground symbolise the continuing support of merit through earnest devotion.

In ancient India the acharya and his disciples would sit together under a tree, mostly a banyan tree, and endlessly discuss the mysteries of the universe. The Upanishads emerged from such disputations. In Shankaracharya's *Hymn to Dakshinamurti*, the following verse describes this tradition: "I bow down to Dakshinamurti, the Teacher of the three worlds, who, seated on the ground under the banyan tree, grants knowledge to all the learned sages who have assembled around him. How strange! The assembled disciples were all aged, and the guru was young. The Guru's sermon was conveyed through his silence, and all doubts of the disciples were cleared up".

Ultimate wisdom is beyond the reach of mind and speech. Yamaraj explains to Nachiketa in the *Kathopanishad*: "This *atma* is not realised through long lectures nor through intellectual effort nor through listening to many sermons". The Buddha experienced the truth of this saying in his own experiments. The Truth dawned upon him in silent contemplation on the Throne of Wisdom under the eternal Tree of Wisdom.

To western travellers, however, the banyan appeared as a tree shrouded in dark mystery. Pliny, Raleigh and others have commented on the evil nature of the tree. Thus, for them, "the proliferating tree is a tree of error... As this tree, so did man grow straight and upright towards God until such time as he had transgressed and broken the Commandment of his Creator. And like unto the boughs of this tree, he began to bend downwards, and toward the earth, which all the rest of Adam's posterity

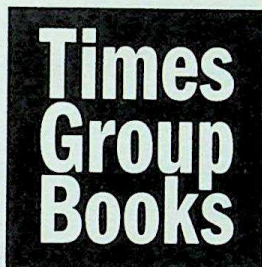


have done, rooting themselves and fastening themselves to this corrupt world". After the Fall, as Milton described in *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve tried to hide their guilt and shame "under a pillared shade, high, overarched, and echoing walks between".

The tree is still echoing the warning: You grow straight and upright until such time as you transgress the limits prescribed for you. As soon as you transgress, you begin to bend downwards rooting yourself in corruption. Like the banyan, the peepal tree, *ashwattha* (that which does not last till tomorrow), also represents a great truth in the Indian tradition. The *Gita* (XV.1-4) says: "They speak of a Cosmic Tree. It is the ever-changing tree of the phenomenal world. Its roots go up, and its branches go down. He who knows it is a man of knowledge. Its form is not visible here, neither its end, nor origin, nor its basis. After cutting down the firmly fixed tree by the mighty sword of non-attachment, one attains the goal from which there is no return."

This idea of the cosmic tree is found in several other traditions also. For the Hebrew tradition states that the Tree of Life spreads downwards from above, and is entirely bathed in the light of the sun. Dante too portrays the pattern of the celestial spheres as the foliage of a tree whose roots (origin) spread upwards.





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dent We went for a week's camp  
him to Mahabaleshwar. One  
how evening, he saw a rock at  
o a the edge with a deep  
sana precipice on the other  
The side and promptly did  
ound shirshasana there.

Of course, nothing could  
yone convince me that this  
e — unique opportunity was  
capa- worth taking. My sleep on  
and Sunday mornings was too  
ck to precious for me. Couple of  
years later, I finally told

## H READERS

succour. As one who was present  
atican for the beatification ceremo-  
nenced a spontaneous out-  
of emotions when the Pope  
her blessed. All around, people  
ery corner of the world shed tears  
the Vatican has not bent any rules  
ring Mother Teresa 'blessed'. The  
does not declare anyone a saint or  
"for their effort in popularising  
nity", but for his or her extraordi-  
nality and heroic virtues, worthy of  
on by fellow Christians. Moreover,  
rch does not attribute any healing  
nt. The healer is God himself, acting  
the powerful and effective inter-  
of the saint to whom one prays.  
e Eruppakkatt, General Editor,  
s, Mumbai

## Sania Days

to tennis players Sania Mirza and  
Chakravathy who scored victories  
emi-finals to set up an all-India final  
omen's singles at the Afro-Asian  
in Hyderabad. Mirza defeated  
Arivelo of the Philippines, while  
vathy quelled a strong attack from  
ia's Sandy Gumulya to assure India  
nd silver medal each. The Andhra  
ment must honour this duo to boost

# Avatars Help Bond With the Divine

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

By Sri Sri Ravishankar

Life is incomplete without union  
with God. It is quite natural that  
a matured mind and a receptive  
heart strives for this union.  
Since long, philosophies were  
born, debates happened, music,  
art and literature evolved  
from this very need. Religions,  
philosophies, practices, custom-  
sand austerities have all  
pointed to one thing — union  
with the Divine.

On an average, the person who  
wakes up to the suffering in his  
life wants to be free from it. For  
this, he looks to the super power  
of creation. The more he looks at  
the misery and shortcomings in  
his life, the farther away he feels  
from the Divinity which is his  
very nature. His heart yearns to  
establish contact with the  
Supreme.

Since ages, man has been striv-  
ing to reduce the gap between  
himself and God. There are two  
ways to do this: One way is to el-  
evate humankind to-  
wards Divinity — this  
is called Siddha, and  
the person who  
achieves this state is  
believed to have at-  
tained perfection. The  
second way is to bring  
God to human level in  
avatar form. Here, Di-  
vinity manifests itself  
for the sake of hu-  
mankind. So man ris-  
ing up to God is Sid-  
dha; God coming  
down, because he cares for you,  
and wants to communicate di-  
rectly with you, is avatar.

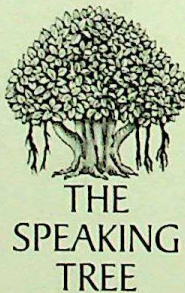
Avatar is God in human  
and in that human  
get a glimpse  
Purn  
experience  
ings of anger, love  
sentment. Rama and Kr-  
ishna went through a gamut of  
human experience in order to  
make us realise that God need  
not be a distant concept; God can  
be one among us. So don't look  
for the superhuman in an avatar  
as the concept is for the Supreme  
Being to come as close  
mans as possible — as one  
among them, as an avatar.

The concept of avatar is com-  
mon in the east in countries like  
India, China, Japan, Korea and  
Nepal. *Nripo Narayano Hari* —  
the king is regarded as the  
avatar of Vishnu. *Vaidhyo*  
*Narayano Hari* — the doctor, too,  
is venerated as Vishnu-avatar. In  
the west, however, the Divine  
Messenger aids spiritual evolu-  
tion. In the east, there is greater  
intimacy between humans and  
God. Hence the avatar is like  
a mother going personally to  
her child — there is greater  
emotional bonding.

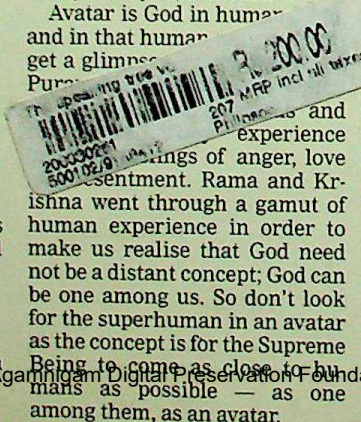
Spiritual evolution through  
heartfelt, personal devotion is  
typically eastern whereas the  
western perspective is based on  
the concept of a messenger and  
hence is necessarily more for-  
mal. The bhaktas and Sufis were  
more comfortable with the idea  
of avatar. For an intimate rela-  
tionship, God comes directly.  
Your love for God becomes  
authentic when you  
are assured of his  
love for you. In the  
*Bhagavad Gita*, it is  
Krishna who first  
tells Arjuna: "You are  
dear to me", which  
enabled Arjuna to  
surrender. Wherever  
you feel immense re-  
spect, wherever you  
get a glimpse of Di-  
vinity, know that it is  
avatar. Avatar lies in  
those who recognise

— and entire creation comes  
alive as Divinity. This is the stage  
before the awareness of "I Am".

The entire phenomenon of  
ation is the descent of con-  
sciousness in various names and  
forms. The whole purpose of  
avatar is to make you realise that  
you are part of Him. Avatar is  
not there to charm you but to  
calm you; to make you return  
home. And to make you realise  
you are the av-  
creation  
you are  
is to me  
is neith  
descent. There is no two.



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